

St John
Chrysostom
Homilies On
Genesis
1-45

THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH

A NEW TRANSLATION

VOLUME 74

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ABBREVIATIONS

- AAS *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (Rome, 1909ff.)
- Bibl *Biblica* (Roma)
- CCG *Corpus Christianorum, Series Graeca*
(Turnhout, 1974)
- CleR *Clergy Review*
- CPG M. Geerard, *Clavis Patrum Graecorum*, vol. II
(Turnhout, 1974)
- Dict. Bibl., Suppl. *Dictionnaire de la Bible*, Supplément ed. L. Pirot
(1928ff.)
- EB *Estudios Biblicos*
- JTS *Journal of Theological Studies*
- ODCC² *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* ed. F. L. Cross
- PG Migne, J. P., ed. *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series graeca*
161 vols. (Paris 1857–1866)
- SC *Sources Chrétiennes*, ed. H. de Lubac et J. Daniélou,
(Paris, 1942—)
- SP *Studia Patristica*. International Conference on Patristic
Studies at Oxford (IU) (Berlin)
- TRE *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*
- VigC *Vigiliae Christianae* (Amsterdam)

INTRODUCTION



THIS IS THE FIRST of several volumes containing the series of 67 homilies composed by St John Chrysostom on the entire book of *Genesis*. Before the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when those editions of the homilies appeared on which our present text rests, the *Genesis* series had been thought to contain only 61 homilies, but fortunately the missing ones have been recovered.¹ This first volume, for reasons of length, contains the first seventeen homilies, bringing Chrysostom's commentary up to *Gn* chapter 3 verse 19, a significant enough moment but so early in his text as to suggest that, as often happens with preachers, he will have to increase his pace to treat of the whole book, which is his intention. Later volumes will complete the remaining three-quarters of the series of homilies.

(2) In addition to this series of 67 homilies, there is extant another small series of 9 sermons on *Genesis* by Chrysostom. The first 8 of these comment likewise (though more generally) on the early chapters of *Gn*, and in places the resemblance is verbatim. The ninth seems somewhat different, but because of its patriarchal material has been placed with this short series. These sermons are not translated in the present work.

1. B. De Montfaucon, whose text and introduction J. P. Migne reproduces in his 1858–60 Paris edition, debates the testimony of Photius, ninth century scholar and successor of Chrysostom in the see of Constantinople, to the number 61; the internal evidence of the present Homily 33, which acknowledges that an intermission had occurred after Holy Week till Pentecost, suggests that Photius has lost five homilies when he claims that only 27 were delivered during Lent.

CHRYSOSTOM'S EXEGETICAL WORKS

(3) The life of this great preacher of Antioch and Constantinople of the late fourth century has been adequately sketched in the previous volumes of the *Fathers of the Church* series devoted to Chrysostom's work,² not to mention Dom Chrysostom Baur's monumental study.³ Only some especially relevant features need highlighting here in view of the particular character of the *Gn* homilies and Chrysostom's role as exegete/commentator/preacher. Firstly, Chrysostom stands within the patristic school of Antioch—and stands high, though perhaps not so influential a figure as Theodore of Mopsuestia—and thus represents an exegetical tradition resting firmly on the literal sense of Scripture as opposed to the Alexandrian school's relish for the allegorical sense.⁴ Secondly, Chrysostom's grounding in biblical studies was at the hands of Diodore of Tarsus, who, though a distinguished exegete now known from extant fragments of commentaries on *Genesis* and *Psalms* (the OT books Chrysostom also devoted most attention to),⁵ himself had no Hebrew and so could not introduce Chrysostom to exegesis of the Hebrew text of those books⁶—a most significant fact for our present work, of course. Thirdly, as I have outlined elsewhere,⁷ the society

2. *Homilies of the Gospel of St. John*, translated by Sister Thomas Aquinas Goggin (FOTC 33, 41; 1957, 1960); *Discourses Against Judaizing Christians* translated by Paul W. Harkins (FOTC 68; 1979); *St. John Chrysostom On the Incomprehensible Nature of God*, translated by Paul W. Harkins (FOTC, 72; 1984); *St. John Chrysostom Apologist*, translated by Paul W. Harkins and Margaret Shatkin (FOTC, 73; 1985).

3. D. C. Baur, *John Chrysostom and His Time* (I 1929, II 1930 (ET London-Glasgow) 1959, 1960).

4. Cf. G. Bardy, "Interprétation chez les pères," *Dict. Bibl., Suppl.* IV (Paris, 1949) 569–91; A. Vaccari, "La teoria nella scuola esegetica di Antiochia," *Bibl.* 1 (1920) 3–36. See also B. Drewery, "Antiochien" in *TRE* III 99–113.

5. Diodore's commentary on *Psalms* (PG 33.1587–1628) in *CCG*, VI *Commentarii in Psalmos* I–I, by Jean Marie Oliver (Turnhout, 1980).

6. As H. von Campenhausen points out in the *Greek Fathers* (1955) (ET London, 1963) 143. "Chrysostom's own admission of his limitations here appears in Homily 4 in clarifying the significance of Hebrew "heaven(s)", where he says, "Those who know that language say . . ."

7. R. Hill, *St. John Chrysostom's Teaching on Inspiration in his Old Testament Homilies* (Sydney, 1981) 27–44.

of the Antioch of the day was swirling with many currents and a prey to all sorts of cultural influences—pagan, Jewish, heretical, sophist; as preacher with developing pastoral responsibility (though perhaps not yet ordained when he delivered the *Gn* homilies) Chrysostom is most anxious to alert his congregation to the dangers to be encountered,⁸ and his polemical manner in this regard can arise from pastoral conscientiousness (nevertheless earning Baur's label of "Die Polemiker").⁹

(4) Chrysostom's extant works outnumber those of any other Father of the East; in the West, Augustine alone is his peer. Predictably for such a zealous preacher and pastor, most of these works are oratorical, even if his treatises on priesthood and other states of life in the Church are well known and much translated. While the manuscript tradition for these works is abundant, there is still much work to be done in deciding on the authenticity of many other works attributed to this illustrious figure.¹⁰ The bulk of Chrysostom's oratorical works are exegetical, over 600 pieces of exegesis/commentary on books of Old and New Testaments, mostly delivered as homilies in Antioch from 385.

(5) Partly for linguistic reasons, partly by preference for authors like Paul, for whom Chrysostom obviously had a warm regard, the New Testament received most frequent attention, though the *Genesis* series seems to have been the earliest—perhaps out of deference to his master Diodore, himself like Chrysostom the author of series of homilies on this part of the Bible. The Old Testament homilies that we seem to be able to accept as authentic number 150: a series of 9 on *Genesis*, our

8. Cf. Homily 2 (warning against Mani, Marcion, Valentinus, pagans, and the *logismoi* of rationalists), Hom.8 (the Jews), Hom.17 (the Anthropomorphites). Cf. his commentary on *Ps* 110 (*PG* 53,264B) where he tilts at the Jews, Paul of Samosata, Arius, Marcion, Mani—all for Christological errors.

9. Baur I, 330.

10. For the present state of the question, cf. M. Geerard, *CPC* II (Turnhout, 1974) *Dubia et Spuria* 4500-4713; J. Quasten, *Patrology* III, 429f; J. A. de Almada, *Repertorium pseudo-chrysostomicum* (Paris, 1965) and S. J. Voicu, "Le corpus pseudo-chrysostomicum Questions préliminaires et état des recherches," *SP* XVII (1982) 1198-1205.

series of 67 on *Genesis*, 5 on Anna, 3 on David and Saul, 58 on *Psalms*, 6 on *Isaiah* ch.6 (sometimes known as 'in Oziam,' and the first of Chrysostom's OT homilies to appear in a modern critical edition),¹¹ and 2 entitled *De Obscuritate Prophetiarum* (which are rather examples of treatises than exegesis, but they do allow Chrysostom to articulate his thinking on the OT).

(6) There are thus two major series of homilies by Chrysostom on the Old Testament, one on *Genesis*, another on *Psalms*. Quasten flatly declares the latter "by far the best," though admitting we probably don't have them in their original form. A reader of both series, however, finds these much less inspiring than the *Genesis* series, which could never be described as "pedestrian, mechanical, desultory."¹² I am in no doubt that the *Gn* series deserves translation for its importance in the history of exegesis. The *Psalms* series can come later.

(7) In addition to the present series of 67 homilies on *Genesis*, therefore, there is also that short series of 9 'sermons' on the same book. The question immediately arises: why two series? why the difference in name between 'homily' and 'sermon'? how did the occasional verbatim similarity arise? The eighteenth century editor De Montfaucon gives to each of the 67 the heading *homilia* and to the 9 (as well as to the 5 on Anna) *logos*, but Chrysostom in his text seems to use only the latter term. F. Cayré distinguishes homilies—series of instructions on entire or almost entire books of Scripture—from exegetical sermons on isolated passages of Scripture.¹³ Quasten refers to both as 'homiliae'.¹⁴ Baur suggests that the 9 sermons alone were actually delivered, whereas the 67 homilies are only Chrysostom's text prepared for delivery but not actually preached in their present form (though stylistic evidence

11. *Homélies sur Ozias* (SC 277), ed. and trans. by J. Dumortier (Paris, 1981); *Commentaire sur Isaïe* (SC 304), ed. and trans. by J. Dumortier (Paris, 1983) which, if authentic, may be only a dehomileticized form of the above.

12. Words used to describe a whole sequence of 18 homilies beginning with Ps 120(119) in my earlier study: R. Hill, *St. John Chrysostom's Teaching on Inspiration in his Old Testament Homilies* (Sydney, 1981) 16–20.

13. *Patrologie et Histoire de la Théologie* 1, Paris 1953, 546–47.

14. *Patrology* III, 434.

would not support this, I feel). Much of this discussion could be said to be guesswork and perhaps of no moment anyhow. Quasten probably has the last word with this caution: "Most of his voluminous Scriptural expositions do not provide enough clues to determine the time of composition or delivery or even their exact order. Some of them might have been published only in written form without having ever been preached."¹⁵ As to the close textual resemblance at times between sermons and homilies (cf. Sermon 2 and Homily 8, for instance), one wonders if we have different versions of an oration delivered on one occasion, or a slight re-tailoring for different occasions. W. A. Markowicz has addressed the problem, considered various solutions, and settled for the obvious one: "Partial repetitions triggered by similarity of circumstance are no surprise to any teacher-preacher of many years."¹⁶ My own conclusion would be that the two series differ in purpose if not in basic material, one occasional, the other (the Homilies) progressively exegetical.

(8) Can we be sure when and where the 67 Homilies on *Genesis* were delivered? Quasten, despite that caution of his against a false search for precision, pinpoints them flatly: "at Antioch during Lent 386."¹⁷ This somewhat contradicts the internal evidence of Homily 33, which, as De Montfaucon's careful argument demonstrates, admits a break in the series after Homily 32 to allow for Easter ceremonies and other sermons on Judas, the Resurrection and the *Acts* right up to Pentecost, when the *Genesis* series resumes. With equally microscopic examination of the text of the *Genesis* and *Acts* homilies, De Montfaucon seizes on references to the Jews (Homily 12 on *Gn*), to the name of a church in Antioch (Homily 2 on *Acts*), to the races (Homily 6 on *Gn*), and arrives at an open verdict on a date, except to eliminate 386 (the year of 8

¹⁵. *Ibid.*

¹⁶. Markowicz, W. A. "Chrysostom's sermons on Genesis: a problem," *JTS* 24 (1963) 652-64, in which he refers to other cases of resemblance in Chrysostom's works.

¹⁷. Quasten, *Patrology* 111, 434. Cayré, *Patrologie*, 546f, equally flatly assigns the homilies to 388, after the sermons in 386. Altaner/Stuiber, *Patrologie*, 324, agrees "... wahrscheinlich 388 gehalten."

of the Sermons on *Gn*) and 387, but he is definite about Antioch as the place. So perhaps it is wisest to adopt Quasten's caution again more cautiously than he did himself, and conclude: the Homilies on *Genesis* seem to have been delivered in Antioch, perhaps as early as the year 385, half just before and during Lent, the remainder (from Homily 33 onwards) after Pentecost. If that early date were established, they would have been given by John the deacon, Chrysostom's ordination to priesthood occurring only in 386, and would thus represent his oratorical debut (not that they betray the tentative manner of a beginner).

(9) With the exception of the *Sources Chrétiennes* editions of the 6 *Isaiah* homilies,¹⁸ there have been no modern critical editions of Chrysostom's Old Testament homilies. The *Corpus Christianorum* of Turnhout has just begun its *Series Graeca*, but at least the Belgians have continued to make available through photographic reproduction Migne's *Patrologia Graeca* of 1857-66, which itself re-edited the eighteenth century edition of Chrysostom's works by the Benedictines under Bernhard De Montfaucon. Since expert opinion differs as to whether or not De Montfaucon's edition is to be preferred to Henry Savile's Oxford edition of 1612 for accuracy,¹⁹ we have in the Migne reprint (thanks to Brepols) an adequate text for translation (*PG* 53 and 54 containing the *Genesis* homilies), and can with less impatience await from today's critical editors the courage required to face the not inconsiderable challenge of editing all Chrysostom's OT homilies.

(10) What, then, has prevented the translation of these homilies into English? Presumably, for one thing, their bulk: being the best represented Greek Father carries its own disadvantages. Yet bulk did not discourage the two great nineteenth century translation projects at Oxford (*Library of the Fathers*) and in the United States (*A Select Library of Nicene and*

18. Cf. note 11 above.

19. Quasten, *Patrology* III, 430-31, and F. L. Cross, *ODCC*² (London, 1974²) 286, opt for Savile; B. Altaner and A. Stuiber, *Patrologie* (Freiburg, 1978⁷) 324, and G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford, 1961) ix, xvii, for De Montfaucon (who admits dependence on Savile but claims to have improved on him).

Post-Nicene Fathers, happily available also in reprint today) from attempting the triply daunting task offered by Chrysostom's New Testament homilies. The result is that there have been to date no English translations of the Old Testament homilies, though *Fathers of the Church* is now moving to adjust that imbalance (unlike other modern translation series like ACW and *The Library of Christian Classics*). There is surely some value judgement operating here: clearly editors in recent times have thought the golden-mouthed orator less weighty a commentator on the more remote material of *Genesis* or *Psalms* than on the Gospels or his beloved Paul.²⁰ This, I surmise, is not due to Chrysostom's relative degree of acquaintance with the language of the biblical text; rather, I am inclined to think an estimate was made of the relative attractiveness of the material and its relevance to theological themes judged most typical of Chrysostom's thought, such as Christology and the Sacraments. This is a pity: the *Genesis* homilies in particular have much to tell of Chrysostom as exegete/commentator/preacher/moralist/breaker of the bread of the Word generally, even if he has been judged not the most conspicuous representative of his school.²¹ And even if it is true that he is "soucieux de tirer des écritures les leçons de morale à l'usage de ses auditeurs,"²² even if he can live up to Baur's label of "Die Polemiker", he is also a profoundly theological commentator on the text with that tremendous respect for Scripture as the inspired Word of God that we associate with the Eastern Church (as we will demonstrate below).²³

20. Similarly, and perhaps consequent upon the relative availability of NT and OT homilies in translation, the major studies of Chrysostom's exegetical works to date (by Haidacher, Chase, Fabbi, Flanagan, Vandenberghe, etc.) rely disproportionately on references to NT homilies.

21. Cf. Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1952) 18: "The homilies of St John Chrysostom in translation were also read and appreciated (in the West). He was by far the best-known representative of Antiochene principles in the West and, at the same time, the author who could teach his readers least about Antiochene exegesis."

22. G. Bardy, "Interprétation," *Dict. Bibl., Suppl.* 581.

23. Cf. R. Hill, "St John Chrysostom and the Incarnation of the Word in Scripture," *Compass Theology Review* 14 (1980) 34-38; R. E. Brown, *The Critical Meaning of the Bible* (London, 1981) 22.

THE HOMILIST AND HIS CONGREGATION
IN ANTIOCH

(11) Presuming that the *Genesis* homilies were delivered in Antioch before Chrysostom's elevation to the See of Constantinople in 398, we can deduce from the text something of the situation in which they were delivered and the congregation to whom they were addressed. If there is truth in the suggestion that Chrysostom was in the habit of moving from church to church to preach, this congregation nevertheless remained the same recipient of the 67 homilies, of which 32 had been delivered on the weekdays of Lent by the time that intermission for Easter came. From this fact, and from their considerable length, we conclude the homilies were not a minor component of an even longer daily liturgy. They commenced with the reading of the text of Scripture (from a variant of the Greek Septuagint version of the Hebrew OT, as we shall see below), which Chrysostom then began to comment on, verse by verse, word by word, even taking individual syllables, as was his manner and was evidently acceptable to his Antiochene congregation—except when he had something else particular to say, such as the opening exhortation on fasting (Homily 1) or that stinging rebuke of those who attended horse racing (Homily 6).²⁴ The members of the congregation seemed a typical group of lay people, from family situations, preoccupied with secular affairs, and yet prepared to assemble daily for a lengthy scriptural homily on a fairly empty stomach in Lent. They are not ignorant people: Chrysostom flatters them in Homily 19 with the ability to choose between variant interpretations of the difficult verse 4.8. They are presumed to be readers of Scripture at home: "I recommend you to have constant recourse to this remedy, and apply yourself diligently to the reading of Sacred Scripture, not only when you come along here, but at home, taking the sacred books in your hands and earnestly absorbing the benefit of their

24. R. Hill, "On giving up the horses for Lent," *CleR* 68 (March 1983) 105–106.

contents. The advantages stemming from this practice are manifold: . . . ”²⁵

So they are not, in Chrysostom's view and in keeping with his notion of scriptural inspiration, passive recipients of a one-way process. He sees inspiration affecting them and himself in various ways and in various situations: “If we have a precise realization of this, we will be able while relaxing at home, both before eating or after eating, to take the sacred books in our hands and gain benefit from them and provide spiritual nourishment for our soul. . . . This, after all, is the secret of our salvation, our spiritual riches, our security. If we defend ourselves in this way day by day, through reading, through listening, through spiritual discourse, we will be able to keep ourselves unharmed and render the devil's wiles ineffectual.”²⁶

Their role is not only to listen, but also to read and engage in spiritual discourse. He frequently envisages them leaving the church after his sermon to go home with their neighbors, and on the way reminiscing together on the day's theme, assisting one another in their recollection of it,²⁷ the better to understand it themselves as well as to teach and admonish others,²⁸ even to engage in controversy with them,²⁹ or perhaps mediating the subject matter to those absent.³⁰ Bible discussion groups at home are also part of their lifestyle.³¹ Whatever of the turbulent religious currents of contemporary Antioch, this congregation led a quite intensely scriptural life.³²

THE STRUCTURE OF THE HOMILIES

(12) As a homilist Chrysostom was not in the business of wasting the time of his listeners; they got good measure,

25. Homily 24; cf. 21.

27. Homily 14.

29. Homily 8.

31. Homily 6; 10.

32. For further detail, R. Hill, *St. John Chrysostom's Teaching on Inspiration in his Old Testament Homilies* 108–21.

26. Homily 10.

28. Homily 14; 20.

30. Homily 10.

whether they liked it or not. Newman could wax poetic on his oratorical style, others compare it to the Attic of Demosthenes;³³ certainly its flowing, meandering, even asyntactic periods discourage the impression the homilies were composed but never delivered. There was, however, little of the original and spectacular in the structure of the homilies—not surprising, in that there are 67 on the one book of the Bible. Normally, there was the opening reading of the day's verse(s). Chrysostom would then link the day's sermon with the previous day's, often through some such figure as the laying of a table; this could occasionally develop into a lengthy moral/dogmatic/polemical excursus unrelated to the *Gn* text and supported from other Scriptural loci. Then—sometimes with abruptness and difficulty after such a lengthy digression (disproportionate enough to discourage again an impression of perfect planning beforehand)—he would take up the day's text for exegesis/commentary.³⁴ Finally, after a substantial time on the text, he would move to a parnetic conclusion, quite perfunctorily done by way of "supplying you with the customary *paraklēsis*,"³⁵ and not always arising naturally from the exegetical material; by this stage patience might be wearing thin, especially as the homilies tended to get longer and longer, and he would feel the need to apologize (cf. Homilies 15, 16, 17, 18, 19)—though thankfully it was some such occasion that provided the beautiful rebuke about the lamplighter in Sermon 4 on *Gn*: "We are explaining the Scriptures to you, while you are turning your eyes away from us, and directing them instead to the lamps and the man lighting them. Such laziness! to turn away from us and attend to him. Here am I lighting the fire of Scripture, and the lamp of its teaching is enkindled on my lips . . ."³⁶

33. Cf. P. J. Ryan, "Chrysostom—a derived stylist?" *VigC* 36 (1982) 5–14.

34. Homily 11 omits reference to *Gn* to deal with imitation of the saints and especially of Chrysostom's model, Paul, through extended commentary on 2 *Cor*.

35. Homily 7; cf. 20.

36. In the Isaiah homilies (Hom. 4 in *Oziam*: PG 56, 121a) there is the equally beautiful metaphor for the preaching on Scripture, where the congregation is compared to a ship's company embarking en route for heaven on

Finally and invariably, as became the pastor and theologian that he patently was, came the brief prayer for congregation and preacher, and the trinitarian doxology.

(13) To describe as exegetical homilies Chrysostom's treatment of *Genesis* and the other parts of the Old Testament is to stretch the definition somewhat; as his contemporary Julian of Eclanum observed, his mediation of the Scriptures was "rather by exhortation than by exposition" (*PL* 21,960). This was partly due to a judgement about his pastoral role and the needs of his congregation: they got what he thought they needed, even if at times not in keeping with the stage of development of the *Genesis* text—such as a lecture on the evils of the race-course, or many reminders of the efficacy of fasting during Lent. His advocacy of fasting does admit of distinction: those who cannot abstain from food can pray, give alms, read the Bible;³⁷ prompt response to the basic moral imperative is pointed out as "real fasting" in case mere abstinence be seen as a fetish³⁸—sound advice from a one-time addict. Beyond that, his moral exhortation centers on several well-worn themes. Most prominent in this series on *Genesis*, perhaps because of his diagnosis of the sin of Adam and Eve as *rhathumia*, "indifference/carelessness/sloth,"³⁹ is the Christian life as a dialectic with indifference and enthusiasm (*prothumia*) as the two opposites.⁴⁰ Other chestnuts include the dialectic between truth and error/deception/the devil's wiles, and as a corollary Chrysostom's warning about the limitations of human reasoning compared with the divine design.⁴¹ The wealth of

a vessel (which is the homily) driven forward by the breath of the Spirit, with Christ himself—the Word—leading the way; Chrysostom himself as preacher has only to launch the boat and supply his tongue as sail to catch the breath of the Spirit. For a translation see R. Hill, "St. John Chrysostom's teaching on inspiration in 'Six Homilies on Isaiah' *VigC* 22 (1968) 30–31.

37. Homily 10.

38. Homily 15.

39. Homily 14; 18; 19; 21. Indifference is also Lamech's flaw in 20.

40. "Binomials" is the name F. Asensio gives to these opposites that characterize Chrysostom's thinking, in his article, "El Crisóstomo y su visión de la escritura en la exposición homilética del Génesis," *EB* 32 (1973) 223–55, 329–56.

41. Homily 12; 15; 21.

Scripture, "beyond all telling" yet hidden beneath the surface, is a constant theme. In this series the Jews⁴² and Judaizers⁴³ do not figure much, despite Baur's remarks about the threat their influential position posed to the faith in Antioch at that period.⁴⁴

(14) Perhaps a word should be said about Chrysostom's sexism, if only for the heavy strain it places on the modern translator. We are not surprised to find him using only the masculine of his congregation in general or of the particular examples he takes. Today's congregations, however, would be less content to have a preacher talk about the wonderful people of sacred history and refer only to men, as Chrysostom invariably does;⁴⁵ in Homily 21 he even recommends them to name their children generally after those holy *andres*. Even when his LXX text reminds him that it is the human being, *anthrōpos*, that is in question—as in the case of its creation⁴⁶—he thinks in terms of the male, so that for him (despite the text) *anthrōpos* and *gynē* become correlatives. His commentary on the Fall in Homily 17 further leads him to a somewhat unbalanced explanation of male superiority on the basis of greater female guilt. Doubtless he is not alone

42. Homily 8 and the following: Wilken, R. L. ed. *Aspects of Wisdom in Judaism and Early Christianity*. (University of Notre Dame Press, 1975). ———. *John Chrysostom and the Jews*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983). ———. *Judaism and the Early Mind: A Study of Cyril of Alexander's Exegesis and Theology*. (Yale University Press, 1971). ——— and W. A. Meeks. *Jews and Christians in Antioch in the First Four Centuries of the Common Era*. (Scholars Press, 1978).

43. Homily 12.

44. Baur I, 331–33. An interesting detail of Chrysostom's thought that strikes the reader when he reaches *Gn* 3.15 is that Chrysostom acknowledges no Messianic or Marian echoes in the text, whether through personal conviction or to discourage his congregation's looking for senses beyond the literal (Homily 17).

45. Cf. Homily 12; 21. Recent works on Chrysostom's sexism include: Clark, Elizabeth A. *Jerome, Chrysostom and Friends: essays and translations*. (New York: E. Mellen Press, 1979). Shore, Sally Ann. *De Virginitate and De non iterando coniugio: On Virginity and Against Remarriage* with an Introduction by Elizabeth A. Clark in *Studies on Women and Religion*, volume 9 (New York, 1983).

46. Cf. Homily 8; 10.

amongst the Fathers with this usage and these attitudes, but they do prove a particular reminder of the distance between his time and our own.

CHRYSTOM AND SCRIPTURE

(15) More to the point in a study of Chrysostom as commentator on Sacred Scripture is the scriptural text on which he is commenting. We have seen that he has not the skills to go beyond the Greek version of the Old Testament; the name Septuagint for this translation has by Chrysostom's time come to cover a whole family of variant forms, and footnotes to the present translation document this diversity. It can therefore not be readily presumed that the *Gn* text read to Chrysostom's congregation and then commented on by him corresponds to any current English version, the text of our best contemporary Hebrew Bibles (like Kittel's) or Septuagint reconstructions (like Rahlfs'), or in the case of the New Testament to a text like that of Aland, Black *et al.* Baur explains that Origen's reconstruction of the LXX had been revised in Antioch by the priest Lucian, who had also worked on the NT text, and that it was probably Lucian's text that Chrysostom would have used. Baur adds, however, a further caveat: "The exact determination of the text was made more difficult because of the fact that Chrysostom, as well as other ecclesiastical writers of older and newer times, often quoted Scripture texts freely and diversely, from memory, and occasionally joined similar quotations, so that it is very difficult to say how his actual text read. For this reason there is lack of an absolutely reliable text of the works of Chrysostom himself."⁴⁷ My procedure has accordingly been to translate each text of Chrysostom individually, noting where significant the degree of departure from 'received texts'. I have also thought it best to keep to a spelling of proper names suggested by that text.

(16) The point has been made above that "exegetical" can

47. Baur I, 318.

be applied to this and other series of Chrysostom's homilies only 'secundum quid'. Whether through pastoral judgement or by force of his own limitations, the great preacher is satisfied with commenting on the text without submitting it to the rigorous processes of exegesis strictly so-called. We have seen above critics like G. Bardy and Beryl Smalley⁴⁸ taking him to task for his shortcomings—though they and other studies of Antiochene exegesis like those by A. Vaccari,⁴⁹ J. N. D. Kelly,⁵⁰ and W. Kaiser⁵¹ tend to concentrate on the narrower area of hermeneutics. In that regard Chrysostom evidences the great respect for the literal sense characteristic of his school, as we shall see. As the complete exegete, however, he has many deficiencies of the kind we would probably expect of someone of his background and time. Occasionally he admits diversity in his text tradition.⁵² He can also allow different interpretations of a difficult text, like *Gn* 4.8, and leave his listeners to make a choice.⁵³ But he shows little critical awareness in his treatment of *Genesis* material. Diversity of sources he knows nothing of: in Homily 12 he passes from one creation narrative to the next almost without reference to the duplication, just remarking that Moses had repeated his "first account" in the interests of that cardinal virtue, *akribeia*, precision. Likewise, as he begins to treat of the Priestly Sethite genealogy at 5.1, he simply remarks that the repetition is accounted for by the need of moral instruction for the listeners/readers.⁵⁴ He takes seriously the "difficulty" he presumes his listeners find in tracing the provenance of a wife for Cain if Scripture thus far has made no mention of girls.⁵⁵ "The names Adam imposed on

48. Cf. notes 21, 22 above.

49. Cf. note 4 above.

50. *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York, 1978⁵) 69–78.

51. Kaiser, W. *Towards an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids, 1981) 57–58. See also Schaublin, Christoph. *Untersuchungen zu Methode und Herkunft der antiochenischen Exegese* (Köln: P. Hanstein, 1974).

52. C. Hay, "Antiochene exegesis and Christology," *Australian Biblical Review* 12 (1964) 10–23, compares Chrysostom unfavorably with Theodore of Mopsuestia for his literary criticism.

53. Homily 19.

54. Homily 21. Just as Moses is responsible for all the *Gn* text, so "blessed David" is for all the Psalms.

55. Homily 20.

the animals remain up to the present time," he says smugly to his audience.⁵⁶ He can draw a simplistic conclusion from his text like that of male superiority referred to above in playing up woman's part in the Fall.⁵⁷ We are not surprised to find that he admits no distinction in character or origins between the parable of the Sower and its allegorical interpretation.⁵⁸ He is impatient with the LXX's linguistic nicety in preferring *Zoe* to *Eva* at 3.20 in Homily 18, and while quoting the former in his text he slips at once into the traditional name without explaining the distinction. None of these niceties, evidently, are relevant to his purpose; to quote Julian of Eclanum again, he proceeded "rather by exhortation than by exposition"—or, perhaps more accurately, his exposition was conducted only to the depth that would serve exhortation.

(17) This moral purpose of his in the commentary on *Gn* is certainly always to the fore, in addition even to the parenetic conclusion to every homily. Not only do critical exegetical details go without mention, but the dogmatic force of the text can yield to its moral content. For Chrysostom, the Fall is principally an instance, if the grossest, of that recurring *rhathumia*, "indifference, carelessness"; its reporting in the text is primarily didactic in his view. Despite the New Testament, Adam is of less significance than Eve and Cain—both exemplars, the one of that same *rhathumia*, the other of unprovoked malice. Likewise, whereas contemporary literary critics like Von Rad highlight the dogmatic significance of the Lamech incident, Chrysostom in Homily 20 makes much of Lamech as a moral figure (who, through a mistranslation by the LXX, becomes not an agent but an object of vengeance). The genealogy that opens Ch.5 of *Gn* is not for Chrysostom an index of a different narrative strand but clear proof that increasing sinfulness has led the author to switch his focus.⁵⁹ To the service of this moral purpose Chrysostom brings also considerable oratorical artistry: the malice and the plight of these key moral figures is brought out by lengthy series of rhetorical questions in

56. Homily 16.

58. Homily 14.

57. Homily 17.

59. Homily 21.

Homilies 19 and 20 that must have made for considerable dramatic effect—all for the moral betterment of the congregation, whether or not this was the primary burden of the text.

(18) The moral thrust in his exposition is evident also in his reference to other books of the Bible. Chrysostom has the Bible at his fingertips, and he expects his congregation to resonate to his wide-ranging scriptural references, which are not always explicit. There would hardly be a homily which does not move beyond the text of *Gn* to quote, especially in those parenetic conclusions and introductions, the words of Christ from Matthew's Gospel,⁶⁰ the psalms of "blessed David", and of course Chrysostom's soul-mate, Paul, "the world's teacher" and his own model.⁶¹ Though ranging widely over the OT and NT canon of his time in the East, he finds this kind of material grist to his mill to a greater extent than historical details, such as the life of Jesus or the historical books of the OT; a glance at the scriptural quotations in this volume will show these books conspicuous by their absence, as also Mark's Gospel. Still, at other times Chrysostom can implicitly hold up the historical personages of the Bible to his congregation as models—again in the moral order.⁶²

(19) Whatever of his skills and approach as exegete and commentator, Chrysostom is utterly scriptural in his preaching to his congregation. It was obviously a predictable choice for the preacher of Antioch to confine his attention solely to *Genesis* and those other parts of the Bible; he refers his listeners to no other literature, no other characters or events, contemporary or historical, than those in the sacred books, except for occasional tilting at notorious heretics whose views contradict the true sense of Scripture. Thankfully, these po-

60. Cf. Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1962) 337: "The book which St. Thomas Aquinas preferred to the whole town of Paris was St. John Chrysostom on St. Matthew (translated by Burgundio of twelfth century)."

61. Cf. the intense admiration that glows in his commentary on Paul's tribulations in Homily 11. See also *De Laudibus Sancti Pauli* (SC 300) ed. and trans. by A. Piédagnel (Paris, 1982).

62. Homily 12:21.

lemical references are not so frequent as to obscure the realization that Chrysostom's esteem for Scripture was not born of the heat of controversy but was the fruit of personal meditation on the Incarnation, a dogma dear to his Antioch school.⁶³ Whether he be a relatively less brilliant luminary of that school, or less critical and no more original than his great Alexandrian predecessor, Origen, whose views he shared on such matters as the authorship and unity of the Scriptures, verbal inspiration and inerrancy,⁶⁴ it is appropriate that recent pontiffs and Vatican II have associated Chrysostom with the incarnational aspect of the Scriptures and the great regard Christians have for them as the incarnate Word of God.⁶⁵

(20) In making this association, these magisterial texts highlight Chrysostom's distinctive notion about the Scriptures, *synkatabasis*—while their English versions follow the regrettable habit of mistranslating this key term as “condescension.” In Chrysostom, however, there is nothing of the patronizing suggested by that word; instead, he has in mind God's gracious acceptance of the limitations (*astheneia*—another key term, also commonly mistranslated as “weakness”) of the human condition—eminently in the Incarnation, and derivatively in that other incarnation of the Word in Scripture.⁶⁶ As F. H. Chase said a century ago: “The great principle expressed by the word *synkatabasis* is of deep and wide application. As in the historical Incarnation the Eternal Word became flesh, so in the Bible the glory of God veils itself in the fleshly garments of human thought and human language.”⁶⁷ For Chrysostom the Scriptures exemplify God's gracious “considerateness” (*not*

63. For a complete treatment of Chrysostom's teaching on Scripture, see R. Hill, *St. John Chrysostom's Teaching on Inspiration in his Old Testament Homilies*.

64. For Origen's teaching on Scripture, see R. P. C. Hanson, *Allegory and Event. A Study of the Sources and Significance of Origen's Interpretation of Scripture* (London, 1959).

65. Cf. *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, AAS 35 (1943) 316; *Dei Verbum* 13; and R. Hill, “St. John Chrysostom and the Incarnation of the Word in Scripture,” *Compass Theology Review* 14 (1980) 34–38.

66. See R. Hill, “On looking again at *synkatabasis*,” *Prudentia* 13 (1981) 3–11.

67. F. H. Chase, *Chrysostom. A Study in the History of Biblical Interpretation*, (Cambridge, 1887) 42.

"condescension") because in them God speaks to human beings in language, and primarily in speech. So many times in the *Gn* homilies are we reminded that it is Moses speaking—"or, rather, the Holy Spirit speaking by his tongue," or some such phrase demonstrating his conviction of inspired authorship.⁶⁸ Hence his great respect for his own role as commentator on the text, an inspired activity as is that of his listeners, and respect for the text in all its minute details: how often do we hear him urging his congregation "not to pass heedlessly by" any small detail, and how often does he heed his own advice by wrestling with some little particle (like the "but" in *Gn* 2.20).⁶⁹ "Sacred Scripture says nothing idly or by chance; every single sound and syllable has a treasure contained in it," he repeatedly urges them.⁷⁰

(21) Hence, of course, his and the Antiochene school's insistence on the literal sense of Scripture and their unwillingness to part company with it too readily in the direction of allegorical interpretation. Belief in the extent of inspiration leads Chrysostom to prize the *akribeia*, "precision", of Scripture (again an oft-mistranslated term, rendered inadequately as "accuracy"—an ironic fate for this champion of precision), prompting in the exegete by way of response to God's considerateness a like precision in exegesis.⁷¹ More than a score of times in the *Gn* homilies he exclaims in admiration, "Let us admire the precision of Sacred Scripture," or some such phrase. The corollary of this stance is his evident reluctance to admit any other sense than the literal; occasionally in commenting on the *Psalms* he feels encouraged to recognize a spiritual sense, very rarely an allegorical sense and then only with the support of the New Testament.⁷² He is content that

68. For details, see R. Hill, *St. John Chrysostom's Teaching on Inspiration in his Old Testament Homilies* 84ff. and R. Hill, "Chrysostom's terminology for the inspired Word," *EB* 41 (1983) 367-373.

69. Homily 15.

70. Homily 18.

71. Cf. R. Hill, "Akribeia: a principle of Chrysostom's exegesis," *Colloquium* 14 (Oct. 1981) 32-36.

72. R. Hill, *St. John Chrysostom's Teaching on Inspiration in his Old Testament Homilies* 144-49.

Scripture, because inspired, teaches the truth, and that the purpose of this truth is the welfare of the reader/listener—it is a saving truth; but he is a disappointment to those moderns whose inadequate notions of inspiration lead them to see inerrancy as its principal effect and cause them to focus on this to the exclusion of the saving effect of the Word⁷³—a distortion that Chrysostom, who keeps his roots in the Incarnation, could not be guilty of. “Let us learn, if you would, the force of what has been read today from the words of blessed Moses. Attend carefully, I ask you, to what is said by us; they are not our words we are speaking, but what the love of God provides for the sake of our salvation.”⁷⁴ What more can be said of the Scriptures, their nature, their origin and purpose? If his oratory has been judged golden, Chrysostom’s theology of the Word is surely profound—something the *Genesis* homilies eminently demonstrate.

73. Chrysostom has suffered in this way at the hands of students less enlightened than himself, like Haidacher (see Quasten III 466–67).

74. Homily 2.

HOMILY 1

Homily on the beginning of the holy season of Lent



I AM PLEASED (21a) and delighted to see the church of God adorned today with the throng of her own children, and to see you all coming together with great joy. I mean, whenever I look upon your beaming faces, I take it as an infallible sign of the satisfaction you feel at heart. —As the wise man said, “The face betrays the joy of the heart.”¹ So naturally I myself arose this morning with more than the usual enthusiasm since I was to share with you this spiritual happiness and I wanted to become a herald for you of the approach of Lent—the medicine, I might say, for your souls. (21b) Like a loving father, you see, the Lord of us all, in his desire that we be cleansed of the sins we have committed with the passing of time, desired a remedy for us through holy fasting.

(2) So let no one be gloomy, no one look sullen, but exult and be glad, and glorify the guardian of our souls, who shows us the best way, and welcome with great joy his approach. Let the pagans be ashamed and the Jews dismayed to see the love revealed by our welcoming the approach of this season with such excitement, (21c) and let them learn through the experience of these things the extent of the difference between them and us. Let them designate as their feasts and festivals drunkenness and all other kinds of licentious and shameful behavior, which it is typical of them to wallow in, but let the Church of God, unlike them, identify feasts with fasting, ne-

1. Prov 15.13. Chrysostom's Old Testament text, as Introduction 15 explains, is a variant of the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation(s) of the original.

glect of the appetite and all the virtues that accompany it. This, in fact, is a true feast, where there is saving of souls, where there is peace and harmony, where the harsh realities of daily life are missing, (21d) without tumult and din and the antics of good cooks and slaughter of brute beasts. Utter rest and quiet, love and joy, peace and gentleness, and a thousand other good things are the order of the day in place of that other behavior.

(3) So come now, I beg you, let us discuss these things, my dear people;² let me urge you first of all to receive our words with great enthusiasm so as to gain something worthwhile and so return home. It is not, after all, idly and to no purpose that we have come here, for one person to do the talking and the other simply to applaud what is said, and so for us to go off home. Instead, it is for me to utter something useful and relevant to (22a) your salvation, and for you to profit from what is said and so to leave here for home after gaining much benefit. The church, you see, is a pharmacy of the spirit, and those who come here ought acquire some appropriate remedies, apply them to their own complaints, and go off the better for it. I mean, blessed Paul confirms this, that mere listening without showing practical response is of no value, when he says: "It is not, after all, the listeners to the law who are at rights with God, but doers of the law who are set at rights."³ Christ, too, in his preaching said: "Not everyone saying to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father in heaven."⁴ (22b) Accordingly, dearly beloved, since we know that no benefit comes to us from listening unless it is brought to its completion in the good works that follow, let us not be listeners only but doers, so that

2. Chrysostom refers to his congregation here as "your *agāpē*", a word that moves in Christian tradition from its meaning of "love" to the love feast of the Eucharist and then the Eucharistic assembly. Chrysostom's usage is at some point along the line of this development, even though his Lenten gatherings seem not to be for the Eucharist.

3. Rom. 2.13. Chrysostom's New Testament text is probably a locally revised text, differing at times (like his OT) from modern reconstructed texts. (Cf. Introduction 15)

4. Mt 7.21.

the works following the words may be for us grounds for confidence.

(4) Accordingly, open up the recesses of your mind so as to receive the sermon on fasting. To make a comparison with a modest and demure bride: those with the task of introducing her to the bridal chamber adorn it with drapes and cleanse the whole house, giving no entrance to untidy servant girls, and only then do they conduct the bride to her chamber. (22c) I would like you to follow this model, purifying your thinking and bidding adieu to indulgence and intemperance; then, with the recesses of your mind open to receive them, welcome the mother of every good, mistress of sobriety and every other virtue—I mean fasting—so that you may enjoy greater pleasure and she may provide you with her own special healing. To put it another way: when doctors intend to prescribe medicine to patients anxious to get rid of putrid, harmful fluids, they direct them to abstain from bodily food (22d) lest it be a hindrance to the power of the medicine instead of its having the effect of demonstrating its true properties. So much the more should we, on the point of receiving that spiritual medicine—the benefit of fasting—purify our thinking and render our mind alert lest it be sodden with drink and find useless and unprofitable what should be of benefit in the exercise.

(5) I know, of course, that what I say today will strike many of you as novel. I beg you, however, not to let ourselves (23a) heedlessly become the slaves of habit, but let us subject these matters affecting ourselves to the process of reason. After all, do you get any benefit from daily gluttony and extreme indulgence? Far from benefit, all you get is harm and intolerable damage. You see, whenever reason becomes sodden through drinking to excess, immediately the benefit gained from fasting is wiped out without trace. I ask you: what could be more distasteful, what more unseemly than people quaffing wine right up till midnight, up to the dawning of the first rays of the rising sun, recking to high heaven from drinking all that wine, a disagreeable spectacle to people they meet, an object of contempt to their household, the laughing stock of all who have some little idea of correct behavior and in the eyes

of everyone (23b) when they draw on themselves the displeasure of God through this extreme intemperance and ill-timed, mindless indulgence. "Drunkards," Scripture says, "will not inherit the kingdom of God."⁵ So what could be worse than the plight of these people who are driven from the precincts of the kingdom for a fleeting and pernicious satisfaction?

(6) God forbid that anyone of you gathered here should be overcome by that weakness. May you instead celebrate each day as it comes with restraint and sobriety, and be free of the storms and tempests that indulgence is accustomed to cause, and thus reach the harbor of your souls—I mean fasting—so as to be in a position to gain its advantages in abundance. I mean, just as indulgence proves to be cause and promoter of countless evils for the human race, in like manner fasting and neglect of appetite have invariably proved the cause of innumerable benefits to us. (23c) God, you remember, in forming human beings in the beginning, knew that they had particular need of this remedy for the salvation of their souls, and so from the outset he gave the first human creature this command: "From all the trees in the garden you are to eat your fill, but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil do not eat."⁶ That text about eating and not eating refers figuratively to fasting. Although man was obliged to keep that command, he did not do so: overcome by intemperance and guilty of disobedience, he incurred a sentence of death. When the devil, as you remember, evil spirit and enemy of our nature as he is, saw the first human being living in the garden, how his life was carefree and how he lived on earth in bodily form yet like an angel, (23d) he wanted to trip him up and dislodge him with the hope of greater promises, and so he cheated him of the possession of what he had. This is the extent of the evil of not keeping within proper limits but aspiring to greater heights. A wise man has made this clear in the words, "Through the devil's envy death entered the world."⁷ Do you see, dearly beloved, how from the beginning it was

5. 1 Cor 6.10.

6. Gn 2.16–17.

7. Wis 2.24.

from intemperance that death had its entry? Notice likewise that later, too, Sacred Scripture repeatedly accuses indulgence, in one place saying, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to entertain themselves,"⁸ in another, "He ate and drank, grew fat and heavy, and for his love returned him scorn."⁹ The inhabitants of Sodom, too, brought that implacable anger upon themselves from this sin, not to mention their other faults; (24a) listen again to the words of the prophet, "This was the sin of the Sodomites, indulgence amid plenty."¹⁰ In short, it crops up repeatedly like some fount or source of every evil.

(7) Do you now recognize the harm caused by intemperance? Look in turn at the instances of good behavior due to fasting. The great Moses, after keeping his fast for forty days,¹¹ was able to get the tables of the Law; and when he came down from the mountain and saw the people's sin, the tablets which he had been successful in obtaining through such intercession he threw down and smashed,¹² thinking it was preposterous that an indulgent and sinful people should receive laws of the Lord's own making. Accordingly, that remarkable prophet had again to undergo forty days of fasting so as to be able to receive again tables like the ones he had broken through the people's sin, and bring them down the mountain.¹³ (24b) The great Elijah, too, underwent a similar period of fasting,¹⁴ escaping the power of death and going up as it were into heaven with a fiery chariot, and to this day he has not experienced death. Likewise Daniel, passionate man though he was,¹⁵ spent many days fasting and received as recompense an awesome vision so that he tamed the fury of the lions and turned them into the mildest of sheep, not by

8. Ex 32.6.

9. Dt 32.15, where Heb. and LXX and Chrysostom's own variant of it all diverge.

10. A précis of Ez 16.49.

11. Cf. Ex 24.18; 21.18.

13. Ex 34.28.

12. Ex 32.19.

14. Cf. 1 Kgs 19.8.

15. Chrysostom proceeds to construct his own midrash of chs 6 and 10 of *Daniel* to labor the point of fasting. The phrase he invariably applies to Daniel, "man of passion", comes from Theodotion's version of the book.

changing their nature but by diverting their purpose without loss of their ferocity. The Ninevites made use of this remedy, too, and won from the Lord a reprieve, ensuring that animals as well as human beings should apply the remedy and so abstain each of them from evil practices; thus they won the favor of the Lord of all.¹⁶ (24c) We could list many other examples celebrated in both Old and New Testaments—but why refer to servants when we should come to the case of the common Lord of us all? Our Lord Jesus Christ, you know, himself underwent fasting for forty days,¹⁷ and, thus prepared, he entered his contest with the devil, giving us an example that through fasting we should arm ourselves and by acquiring strength from that exercise we should come to grips with that formidable enemy.

(8) At this point, however, someone who looks critically at things and keeps his faculties alert may perhaps pose the question: why is the Lord seen to fast for the same number of days as his subjects, and why did he not surpass that number? It was not idly or to no purpose that this happened, but according to the Lord's own wise purposes and his loving kindness. (24d) I mean, in case it would appear that he had simply come on earth without taking flesh and becoming a human being except in appearance, he fasted for the very same number of days to make this point, not adding any days, so as to curb the rivalry of people wanting to act unrestrainedly.¹⁸ You see, if there are still those rash enough to speak this way even when the Lord acted as he did, what would they not have attempted to say if he had not in his providence robbed them of any pretext? So he resisted the temptation to fast for a longer period of days than his subjects; thus he taught us a lesson, that he has taken the human condition on himself and is not living apart from our human situation.

(9) Since it is now clear to you from the example both of the Lord and his subjects that the value of fasting is considerable,

16. Cf. Jonah 3.

17. Mt 4.2; Lk 4.2.

18. Chrysostom is a great exponent of the school of Antioch in its insistence on the Incarnation and the humanity of Jesus.

and that great benefit accrues to the soul from it, I beg you, my dear people, now that you know its (25a) benefit not to resist its saving power through indifference¹⁹ nor lose heart at its approach, but rejoice and be glad, as blessed Paul says, "The more our external selves are destroyed, the more the inner person is renewed."²⁰ Fasting is nourishment for the soul, you see, and just as bodily nourishment fattens the body, so fasting invigorates the soul, provides it with nimble wings, lifts it on high, enables it to contemplate things that are above, and renders it superior to the pleasures and attractions of this present life. And just as the lightest ships cross the seas more rapidly whereas those weighed down with much cargo take on water, in like manner fasting leaves the faculty of reason nimble and enables it to negotiate the problems of life adroitly and fly to heaven and the things of heaven, (25b) despising the things of this life as being no less evanescent than shadows and dreams. Indulgence and intemperance, on the other hand, weigh down our reason, fatten the body, and shackle the spirit, hemming it in on all sides; they deprive the judgement of reason of any dependability, inducing it to follow dangerous courses, and thus work in every way against our salvation.

(10) Let us not be careless, dearly beloved, in dealing with matters concerning our salvation; recognizing instead the troubles that could come from that evil source, let us avoid the harm it produces. After all, we are warned against intemperance not only in the New dispensation by its greater attention to right thinking, its more frequent struggles and greater effort, its many rewards and ineffable consolations. Not even people living under the Old Law were permitted to indulge themselves in that way, (25c) even though they were sitting in the dark, dependent upon tapers, and brought forward gradually into the light, like children being weaned off milk. Lest

19. Indifference, negligence, sloth is for Chrysostom, who is above all a moral commentator, the capital sin, just as enthusiasm, zeal is the cardinal virtue. These virtues and vices will predominate in his commentary of *Genesis*, determining relative emphasis given to incidents and characters. This says much of Chrysostom himself, whatever of its effect on his commentary.

20. 2 Cor 4.16.

you think I am idly finding fault with intemperance in what I say, listen to what the prophet says: "Woe to those who fall on evil days in sleeping on beds of ivory, luxuriating on their couches, living on a diet of goats picked from the flocks and suckling calves from the herds, and drinking strained wines, anointed with precious unguents—like men treating this as a lasting city, and not seeking one to come."²¹ Do you see the heavy accusation the prophet levels against intemperance in charging the Jews with these faults of stupidity, sensuality and daily gluttony? I mean, note the accuracy of the words: (25d) after attacking their gluttony and their drinking to excess, he added, "like men treating this as a lasting city, and not seeking one to come," all but stating that their satisfaction got as far as lips and palate, and they went on to nothing better. Pleasure, however, is brief and fleeting, whereas pain never lets up and has no end. The truth of this comes from experience, the true meaning of lasting realities—"like men treating this as a lasting city"—and fleeting things—"not seeking one to come"—that is, not lasting for a moment.

(11) All human and carnal things, after all, are of this kind like pleasures, human glory and power, like wealth and all the prosperity of this present life; these things have nothing firm about them, nothing steady, nothing fixed, but shift more rapidly than the currents of a river, leaving naked and desolate (26a) those swept along in them. Spiritual things, on the other hand, are not like that—quite the opposite, in fact: firm and immovable, not subject to change, lasting forever. What folly, then, would it be to exchange the immovable for the tottering, the permanent for the passing, the enduring for the fleeting, what promises to give joy in eternity for what offers us terrible punishment there?

(12) Considering all this, therefore, dearly beloved, and placing great store on our salvation, let us despise intemperance as mindless and harmful, let us embrace fasting, and right attitudes along with it; let us display a renewed life-style, and address ourselves daily to performance of good deeds. In

21. Am 6.3–6, somewhat re-arranged in Chrysostom's variant text.

this way, having spent all the holy season of Lent (26b) dealing in spiritual goods and amassing great wealth of virtue, we would thus merit to arrive at the Day of the Lord and approach with confidence that awesome spiritual banquet, and with conscience pure share in those ineffable and immortal goods, being filled therefrom with grace and with the prayers and intercessions of those well-pleasing to Christ our loving God, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, power and honor, now and forever, for ages of ages. Amen.

HOMILY 2

*On the beginning of creation: "In the beginning
God created heaven and earth."*¹



ODAY, LOOKING AT your dear faces, I am filled with great happiness. (26c) My happiness is not simply that of doting parents who are pleased to have their children milling around them and bringing them pleasure by some other nice behavior or attention to them. My joy and satisfaction now is keener than that, to see the way you have come together here in a spiritual assembly with such propriety, ardent in your desire to hear the divine sayings, spurning nourishment and longing for spiritual feasting, thus demonstrating in deed that word of the Lord which reads: (26d) "Human beings will not live on bread alone, but on every word coming from the mouth of God."²

(2) So come now, let us imitate the farmers: when they see the land scarified and cleared of the obstruction of weeds, they sow the seed liberally. It should be the same with ourselves. When by the grace of God the soil which is our spiritual self is cleared of troublesome passions and is relieved of intemperance, there are no storms or tempests at any stage of its reasoning, but only peace and the great tranquillities of a mind ready to fly aloft, you might say, right up to heaven, and contemplate spiritual things in preference to carnal. (27a) So

1. Gn 1.1. Chrysostom, of course, as Introduction 3 & 15 mentions, is commenting on his LXX text, and is unaware of the recommendation of some modern commentators on the Heb. text to take v.1 as a subordinate clause, v.2 as parenthetical, and only v.3 as the principal assertion, lest God's creative activity be seen to result at once in chaos (cf. Speiser, *Genesis*, 12–13). Others, like Von Rad, join Chrysostom in maintaining the independence of v.1 as an important theological statement.

2. Mt 4.4; cf. Dt 8.3.

I would like to address a few points, dearly beloved, to you, and today take up some of the finer details after proposing to you the teachings of Sacred Scripture. I mean, if we don't attempt this, now that fasting and neglect of appetite are in force, and there is the serenity that arises from calm reasoning, when will we be able to propose it to you in your goodness? When you are beset by intemperance and gluttony and utter idleness? Hardly. In that case we ourselves would be powerless to do anything worthwhile, and you would be unable to accept anything said to you, being swept along by an unruly flood of thought as though by some billowing fog.

(3) So now is the right time, if ever there was one, for teachings of the kind I have in mind, when the maid no longer resists her mistress, but is docile, responsive and obedient, restraining the impulses of nature (27b) and keeping within proper limits. Fasting, after all, is our peace of soul, the charm of old people, the instructor of the young, the model of the prudent, adorning every age and disposition like a diadem. Let there be no sign today of uproar or outcry, no chopping of carcasses or antics of cooks; out with all this, and let our city present the appearance of some proper lady, nice and charming. You see, when I take account of the transformation that has occurred overnight from the perturbation I remember from yesterday, I'm amazed and staggered at the efficacy of fasting, how it can take over and alter everyone's attitude, purifying the minds not only of rulers but of ruled, not only freemen but slaves, not only men (27c) but women, not only rich but poor, not only those familiar with the Greek language but also those who do not speak Greek. But why talk of rulers and ruled? The wearer of the crown along with everyone else has his attitude brought under obedience by fasting. Today there is no difference to be seen between the rich man's table and the poor man's; instead, there is simple living in everyone's case, free of any luxury or show, with people coming with greater relish to the simplicity of the meal today than when they were provided with sumptuous fare and wine unstinted.

(4) Do you see, dearly beloved, from these introductory

words the efficacy of fasting? Accordingly, I address myself to you with greater enthusiasm today than before, (27d) in the knowledge that I am casting seed upon rich and fertile soil, capable of yielding to us in rapid time an abundant return of what was sown. So let us learn, if you would, the force of what has been read to you today from the words of blessed Moses. Attend carefully, I ask you, to what is said by us; they are not our words that we are uttering, after all, but what the love of God provides for the sake of your salvation. What are they? "In the beginning God made heaven and earth." It is in order to pose the question here: why did this blessed author, born many generations later, put this to us? Not idly or without good reason. You see, when God formed human beings in the beginning, he used to speak to them personally, in a way that was possible for human beings to understand him.³ This was the way, for example, that he came to Adam, the way he (28a) upbraided Cain, the way he conversed with Noah, the way he accepted Abraham's hospitality. And even when all humankind fell into evil ways, the creator of all did not abandon the human race. Instead, when they then proved unworthy of his converse with them, he wanted to renew his love for them; he sent them letters as you do to people far away from you, and this drew all humankind back again to him. It was God who sent them letters, Moses who delivered them. What do the letters say? "In the beginning God made heaven and earth."

(5) Notice this remarkable author, dearly beloved, and the particular gift he had. I mean, while all the other inspired authors told either what would happen after a long time or what was going to take place immediately, this blessed author, being born many generations after the event, (28b) was guided by the deity on high and judged worthy to narrate what had been created by the Lord of all from the very beginning. Accordingly, he began with these words: "In the beginning God created heaven and earth." He well nigh bellows at

3. This is the beautiful theology of the Scriptural Word characteristic of Chrysostom. Cf. Introduction 19-21, *St. John Chrysostom's Teaching on Inspiration in his Old Testament Homilies* and other works of mine on the subject cited in the Bibliography.

us all and says, "Is it by human beings I am taught in uttering these things? It is the one who brought being from nothing who stirred my tongue in narrating them." Since we therefore listen to these words not as the words of Moses but as the words of the God of all things coming to us through the tongue of Moses, so, I beg you, let us heed what is said and part company with our own reasoning. Scripture, after all, says: "The thoughts of mortals are deceptive, and their thinking unreliable."⁴ (28c) Let us accept what is said with much gratitude, not overstepping the proper limit nor busying ourselves with matters beyond us; this is the besetting weakness of enemies of the truth, wishing as they do to assign every matter to their own reasoning, and lacking the realization that it is beyond the capacity of human nature to plumb God's creation.

(6) But why mention God's creation? Even human arts germane to them are beyond them. Tell me, for instance, how the substance of gold takes shape through the art of mining? or how the purity of glass comes from sand? You can't tell. So if it's impossible to fathom what lies before your very eyes and the things which human wisdom devises, thanks to God's loving kindness, (28d) why busy yourself, mere mortal, about the things created by God? What sort of excuse would you manage to adduce? and what defense would you invent for contemplating what lies beyond your natural powers? I mean, to say that existing things came to be from underlying matter, and not to admit that the Creator of all produced them from non-existence, would be a mark of utter stupidity. Accordingly, this blessed author, when he was on the point of beginning the book, stopped the mouths of such idiots, by beginning like this: "In the beginning God made heaven and earth." When you hear "He made," concern yourself no further, but with head bowed believe what is said. For God it is who makes and transforms all things, and refashions all things according to his will.

(7) See (29a) the great extent of the consideratencess⁵ in this statement; there is no mention of unseen powers, nor does it

4. Wis 9.14.

5. Chrysostom's notion of the "consideratencess" of God evidenced in the

say, In the beginning God made the angels, or the archangels. It was not idly or without purpose⁶ that he took this line in his teaching. I mean, since he was talking to Jews, people quite wrapped up in the world about them and incapable of forming any spiritual notion, he led them along for the time being from visible realities to the creator of all things, so that from created things they might come to learn the architect of all and adore their maker, not stopping short at creatures. You see, despite the creation of the world they had not avoided the error of making gods out of creatures, offering worship to the vilest of brutes; so what madness would they not have fallen into if such considerateness had not been shown them?

(8) Don't be surprised, dearly beloved, if Moses followed this procedure (29b) speaking as he was at the beginning in the early stages to very down-to-earth Jews, when even Paul in the age of grace, when proclamation of the good news had advanced so much, was able, in the speech he was on the point of delivering to the Athenians, to base his teaching to them on visible realities, in these words: "God made the world and everything in it; being Lord and maker of heaven and earth, he does not dwell in man-made temples, nor can human hands pay him due worship."⁷ I mean, he could see that kind of approach suited them, so he followed that line; that is to say, he was guided by the Spirit to direct his teaching to the ones who would receive what he had to give them. To learn that his basis for deciding this was the difference in his audience and the materialism of his listeners, listen to his words. In addressing his letter to the people of Colossae (29c) he did not keep to that approach, but addressed them differently, in these words: "In him were created all things—those in the heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether

Scriptures is his most characteristic contribution to patristic thinking on the Word. See Introduction 20.

6. This, too, is a characteristic phrase of Chrysostom's stressing the "precision" of Scripture and arising out of that "considerateness"; it occurs 39 times in the *Genesis* homilies. See R. Hill, "*Akribeia*: a principle of Chrysostom's exegesis," *Colloquium* 14 (Oct. 1981) 32-36.

7. Acts 17:24-25.

thrones, dominations, principalities, powers—all were created by him and with him in mind.”⁸ John, the Son of Thunder, by contrast shouted aloud, “Everything was made through him, and without him no single thing was made.”⁹

(9) Moses, however, did not speak like that, as you’d expect; after all, it wasn’t logical that those still requiring to be fed on milk be given solid food instead. To take another example: whereas teachers who have been entrusted by parents with the education of their children give them the fundamentals of learning, those who receive the children from them at the next stage take them through more developed stages of learning. (29d) This same pattern was followed by blessed Moses, by the teacher of the Gentiles, and the son of thunder. When Moses, remember, in the beginning took on the instruction of the human race, he taught his listeners the elements, whereas Paul and John, taking over from Moses, could at that later stage transmit more developed notions.

(10) Hence we discover the reason for the considerateness shown to date, namely, that under the guidance of the Spirit he was speaking in a manner appropriate to his hearers as he outlined everything. At the same time he uprooted all the heresies springing up like weeds in the Church by his words, “In the beginning God made heaven and earth.” Even if Mani accosts you saying matter preexisted, or Marcion, or Valentinus, or pagans,¹⁰ tell them directly: (30a) “In the beginning God made heaven and earth.” But what if the person does not believe in the Scriptures? Leave him to his own devices, like an utter madman; for what allowance can you make for a person who does not believe the creator of all things, who treats the truth as falsehood? People of that ilk sport false colors: while wearing the appearance of sweet reasonableness, they are in fact wolves in sheep’s clothing. Don’t you be taken in; on the

8. Col 1.16.

9. Jn 1.3.

10. Chrysostom is very much aware of the pluralism of theological opinion of his day, and frequently takes issue with heterodox views, earning from his great historian, Dom Baur, the label “Die Polemiker.” Fortunately, the *Genesis* homilies arise more from theological meditation and pastoral concern, and are not overly punctuated with polemical asides.

contrary, spurn this behavior all the more for the reason that, while they pretend an obsequiousness towards you though simply your peer, towards God the Lord of all they wage open warfare and do not perceive that they are running from salvation. Let us, on the other hand, cling to the unshakeable rock and keep coming back to the beginning, (30b) "In the beginning God made heaven and earth."

(11) Notice how the divine nature shines out of the very manner of creation, how he executes his creation in a way contrary to human procedures, first stretching out the heavens and then laying out the earth beneath, first the roof and then the foundation. Who has ever seen the like? Who has ever heard of it? No matter what human beings produce, this could never have happened—whereas when God decides, everything yields to his will and becomes possible. So don't pry too closely with human reasoning into the works of God; instead, let the works lead you to marvel at their maker. Scripture says, remember, "What the eye cannot see in him has come into view from the creation of the world and are understood through the things he has made."¹¹ (30c) If the enemies of truth insist on saying it is impossible for something to be produced from nothing, let us ask them. The first human being—was he made from the earth, or did he come from somewhere else? To a man they'll say from the earth, and make no bones about it. So let them tell us how the substance of flesh came into existence from the earth. I mean, from the earth you get clay, and bricks, and pottery, and potsherds so how would you get the substance of flesh? how would you get bones and nerves and arteries, fat and skin, nails and hair, and all the qualities of different substances from one underlying material? They wouldn't be able to open their mouth in reply. Yet why do I confine my remarks to the body? Let them tell us about the bread we eat daily, how it is changed into blood, gall, bile, and various humors while being one in composition. (30d) Bread often has the color of grain, whereas blood is red or black. So, if they can't tell about these things

11. Rom 1.20.

that are before our eyes day in and day out, they would hardly tell us about all the other things created by God. If, however, despite such an embarrassment of proofs they want to insist on reinforcing their own obstinacy, let us likewise keep throwing back in their teeth the words, "In the beginning God made heaven and earth." This single sentence, after all, is enough to overthrow all the defenses of our adversaries, and to tear up all their human reasonings, roots and all; and should they ever want eventually to abjure their polemics, it would be possible through this verse for them to be led to the path of truth.

(12) The text proceeds: (31a) "The earth was invisible and lacking all shape."¹² For what reason, tell me, did he create the sky bright and finished, but let the earth appear formless? This too was not done without purpose; his intention was that you would learn about his craftsmanship from the better part of creation, and so have no further doubts or think that it all happened out of a lack of power. For a quite different purpose he produced the earth in a formless condition. The earth, you know, is our mother and provider; to it we owe our beginning and our growth; this is homeland and grave for us all alike; to the earth we come back in the end, and through it we lay hold of countless benefits. So in case human beings might through the pressure of necessity treat the earth with a respect beyond its due, he shows it to you first formless and imperfect (31b) so that you would not attribute the earth's gifts to it but to the one who brought it into existence from nothing. For this reason the text reads: "The earth was invisible and lacking all shape."

(13) Perhaps our first reaction is to submit our minds immediately to a whole range of intricate questions. So it's better to conclude our sermon at this point, exhorting you in your goodness to remember what has been said and keep it ever in

12. Gn 1.2. Modern translations render this verse, "The earth was a formless waste," or some such. Chrysostom's LXX text, however, seems to turn the strange Heb. phrase into "invisible," *avoratos*—as if someone has read that word mistakenly for *aoristos*, "formless." Chrysostom has no difficulty justifying his text, however, as we shall see in Homily 4.

your mind; when you go home from here, lay out with your meal a spiritual meal as well. The father of the family might repeat something of what was said here; his wife could then hear it, the children too could learn something, even the domestics might be instructed. In short, the household might become a church,¹³ so that the devil is driven off and that evil spirit, (31c) the enemy of our salvation, takes to flight; the grace of the Holy Spirit would rest there instead, and all peace and harmony surround the inhabitants. After all, if you keep in mind what has been said previously and more eagerly accept what is said later, we for our part will speak with greater zeal and eloquence what God's grace has given us when we see the harvest already following the sowing. When the farmer sees the seeds sprouting, he tills the fields with greater eagerness and hastens willingly to make further sowings.

(14) So, to make us more enthusiastic, take good heed of what has been said already, and with right teachings give great attention to caring for your life. (31d) Scripture says, "Let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works, and glorify your father in heaven,"¹⁴ in order that your life may conform with your teachings, and your teachings reveal your life. After all, "faith without works is dead,"¹⁵ and works without faith are dead. For even if we have sound teachings but fail in living, the teachings benefit us nothing; likewise, if we take pains with life but are careless about teaching, that will not be any good to us either. So it is necessary to shore up this spiritual edifice of ours in both directions as Scripture says, "Everyone listening to my words and acting on them will be likened to a wise man."¹⁶ Notice how this person intends not merely to listen but to act, and to demonstrate his listening by his actions; this is the one called

13. When Vatican Council II (LG 11) quotes this notion of the domestic Church from Christian tradition, it might have acknowledged Chrysostom at this and other places. [Ed. Note: But cf. *Constitutionis Dogmaticae Lumen Gentium Synopsis Historica*, a cura di Giuseppe Alberigo, Franca Magistretti, Bologna, 1975, 32/305, which cites *In Gen.* h. 2.4, PG 53.31, and *In Gen.* s. 6.2, PG 54.607.]

14. Mt 5.16.

15. Jas 2.26.

16. Mt 7.24.

wise, the one (32a) giving evidence of deeds in the wake of words, whereas the one who stopped short at words was called a fool. And rightly so; after all, such a person built his house on sand, and so it could not withstand the onset of winds but quickly collapsed.¹⁷ You see, such people are lazy, not standing firm on the spiritual rock; the point of this parable is not a house or building, but people, those being buffeted by the onslaughts of some temptation. Under the name of wind, rain and waters, the text is suggesting to us the onset of temptations. Of course, people who are firm and watchful and restrained are made even stronger by these assaults: the more they are afflicted by adversity, the more their virtue is increased. But with the lazy and fainthearted, if only a gentle breeze of temptation touches them, immediately they shake and collapse, (32b) not from the strength of the temptations but from their own weakness of will.

(15) So let us be sober and watchful, and prepared for everything, so that we may be well disciplined in prosperity and restrained under the onset of adversity, showing great prudence and constantly rendering thanks to the loving God. If we manage our lives this way, we shall enjoy much favor from on high and thus be able to pass our life on earth securely and have much confidence regarding the life to come. May we all reach it, through the love and goodness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be glory, sovereignty and praise, now and forever, for ages of ages. Amen.

17. Cf. Mt 7:26-27.

HOMILY 3

Further comment on the verse, "In the beginning God made heaven and earth,"¹ up to the verse, "Evening came and morning came: one day."²



READING (32C) THE HOLY Scriptures is like a treasure.³ With a treasure, you see, anyone able to find a tiny nugget gains for himself great wealth; likewise in the case of Sacred Scripture, you can get from a small phrase a great wealth of thought and immense riches. The Word of God is not only like a treasure, but is also like a spring gushing with everflowing waters in a mighty flood; this we all perceived from what we did yesterday. We began, remember, at the opening of the book of *Genesis* on the words, "In the beginning God made heaven and earth," and dealt completely with all its contents, without however being able to grasp it fully. You see, great is the yield of this treasure and the flow of this spiritual fountain. Don't be surprised if we have experienced this: (32d) our forebears drank from these waters to the limit of their capacity, and those who come after us will try to do likewise, without risk of exhausting them; instead the flood will increase and the streams will be multiplied.

1. Gn 1.1.

2. Gn 1.5. Speiser notes: "In Semitic the normal ordinal series is 'one, second, third,' etc., not 'first, second, third,' etc." (*Genesis*, 6)—something lost on the LXX, evidently, and on Chrysostom.

3. Chrysostom employs a wide range of figures for the saving truth that is Sacred Scripture: a rich table or feast (his favorite), a treasure (especially gold and gems to be mined), food and drink, remedies for ailments, arms for warfare, an overflowing stream—figures that H. De Lubac parallels from the Latin Fathers, so evidently the stock-in-trade of churchmen of the time (cf. *Exégèse Médiévale* I (Paris 1959), 119–20, and *St. John Chrysostom's Teaching on Inspiration in his Old Testament Homilies* 160–69).

(2) Such, after all, is the nature of spiritual streams the more earnestly anyone tries to draw the water, the more they abound and the spiritual grace is increased. Hence Christ said, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. If anyone believes in me, as Scripture says, rivers of living water will flow from his belly"⁴ indicating to us the abundance of the waters. So since this is the nature of spiritual waters, come, let us all constantly bring the vessels of our minds to be filled, and thus return home. For whenever the Spirit (33a) sees an ardent desire and a watchful mind, he freely grants it abundant grace. So step aside from your daily preoccupations and from things that threaten to suffocate your thinking like weeds, and let us give free rein to spiritual desires so that we may gain great advantage from this consideration and receive much benefit; then we can go home.

(3) But in order that the sermon may be clearer to you, let us remind you in your goodness⁵ of some details of what was said yesterday so as to fit together, as into one whole, what is to be said today with what was said yesterday. We showed you yesterday, as you will recall, how blessed Moses explained to us the creation of these visible elements in saying (33b) that "in the beginning God made heaven and earth; the land was invisible and lacking all shape." And we taught you why he left the land unshaped and unpeopled, and I think you remember it all precisely, so today we must proceed to what follows in the text. You see, when he says, "The land was invisible and lacking all shape," he teaches us precisely how it came to be invisible and lacking all shape, adding, "Darkness was over the deep, and the Spirit of God moved over the water."⁶ Notice in this case, I ask you, the economy of the blessed author, how he does not describe all created things individually, but teaches us which items were produced together by mentioning heaven and earth and passing over the rest. (33c) I mean, he had made no mention of the creation of the waters, but then said, "Darkness was over the deep, and the Spirit of God

4. Jn 7:37-38.

6. Gn 1:2.

5. Cf. Homily 1, note 2 above.

moved over the water" this, you see, was covering the face of the earth, darkness I mean, and the depths of water. From this we learned that all that could be seen was depths of water, covered in darkness and having need of the wise creator to remove all this shapelessness and bring everything to a condition of order.

(4) "Darkness," the text says, "was over the deep, and the Spirit of God moved over the water." What is meant by that part of the text, "The Spirit of God moved over the water"? It seems to me to mean this, that some lifegiving force was present in the waters: it wasn't simply water that was stationary and immobile, but moving and possessed of some vital power. (33d) I mean, what doesn't move is quite useless, whereas what moves is capable of many things. So, to teach us that this water, great and cumbersome as it was, had some vital power, he says, "The Spirit of God moved over the water." It is not without reason⁷ that Sacred Scripture makes this early comment. Instead, it intends later to describe to us that creatures in these waters were produced by command of the creator of all things, and so at this point it teaches the listener that water was not idly formed, but was moving, and shifting, and flowing over everything.

(5) So, when the shapeless mass of all that could be seen lay about on all sides, God the mighty artificer issued his command and the shapeless mass took on form, the surpassing beauty of this blinding light appeared and (34a) dissipated the palpable gloom, illuminating everything. "God said," the text reads, "'Let light be created,' and light was created."⁸ He spoke: it was created; he gave his command: darkness was scattered and light produced. See his ineffable power? Yet there are those who ignore the sequence of the text, caught up as they are in their error, and who pay no heed to the words of blessed Moses, "In the beginning God made heaven and earth," and the following verse, "The land was invisible and lacking all shape" on account of its being obscured by the darkness and the waters, the Lord having decided (you see) to

7. Cf. Homily 2, note 6 above.

8. Gn 1.3.

create it in the beginning like this. These people say that matter was the basis for creation, and that darkness preexisted. What could be worse than this madness? You heard that "in the beginning God made heaven and earth," and that from nothing things were created, and do you say that matter was the basis for creation? Who in their right minds would come up with such idiocy? (34b) Surely the creator is not human, needing some basis for creation so as to reveal his artistry? God it is to whom all things respond as he creates them by word and command. Remember how he merely spoke, and light was created and darkness dissipated.

(6) "God separated light from darkness."⁹ What is meant by "He separated"? He gave each its own place and defined its appropriate time. And when this had been done, he then gave each its proper name. The text goes on, you see: "God called the light day, and the darkness night."¹⁰ Do you see the excellent distinction and the wonderful craftsmanship, surpassing all comment, happening by a single word and command? Do you see the degree of considerateness¹¹ employed by the blessed author, or rather the loving God through the tongue of the author, instructing the race of men to know the plan of created things, (34c) and who was the creator of all, and how each came into being?

(7) I mean, since mankind was yet untutored and could not understand more elaborate matters, the Holy Spirit accordingly explained everything to us by moving the author's tongue in such a way as to take account of the limitations of the listeners. To be convinced that it was on account of the incompleteness of our understanding that he employed such considerateness in his explanation, compare the approach of the Son of Thunder: when humankind had advanced along

9. Gn 1.4b. Chrysostom seems to have forgotten the first half of the verse, "God saw that the light was good;" but he soon returns to labor the point.

10. Gn 1.5.

11. Again (and again and again, as we shall see) Chrysostom invokes his favorite principle of *synkatabasis* in reference to the Scriptures and their authors divine and human; "considerateness," let it be noted—nothing of the patronizing connotation of "condescension," despite the common mis-translation.

the path to perfection, no longer did he have them move by this lower way, but led his listeners to a loftier teaching. "In the beginning was the Word," he said, you remember, "the Word was with God, and the Word was God,"¹² and added, "He was the true Light, which enlightened everyone coming into the world."¹³ In other words, just as in our text this visible light, produced by command of the Lord, (34d) removed the darkness from our vision, in like manner the light coming to our minds dissipated the darkness of error, and led those in error to the truth.

(8) So let us receive the teachings of Sacred Scripture with deep gratitude, not resisting the truth nor persisting in darkness, but hastening towards the light and performing actions proper to the light and the day. That is what Paul recommends to us when he says, "Let us walk becomingly as the light of day suggests"¹⁴ and not perform actions proper to the dark.

(9) The text goes on: "God called the light day, and he called the darkness night." Now, a detail that almost escaped us we need to pick up again. I mean, when it said, "'Let light be created,' and light was created," it added, "God saw that the light was good."¹⁵ See there, dearly beloved, (35a) the extent of the considerateness in the language. What is the point of the remark? Is it that before the light comes into being he does not know it is beautiful, whereas after its appearance the sight of it shows its creator the beauty of what appears? What sort of sense would that make? I mean, if a man works at some piece of craftsmanship, and before he completes the thing he is making and puts final touches to it he sees the use to which he will put the thing he is making, how much more the creator of all, who by his word brings into being everything from non-being, sees that the light is good before he creates it. So why did he use this expression?

(10) This blessed author spoke this way out of considerateness for the way human beings speak. And just as people

12. Jn 1.1.

14. Rom 13.13.

13. Jn 1.9.

15. Gn 1.4a.

work on something with great care, and when they bring their efforts to completion (35b) they parade what they have made for scrutiny and commendation, so Sacred Scripture speaks in that way, showing considerateness for the limitations of our hearing when it said, "God saw that the light was good," and added, "God separated light from darkness; he called the light day, and he called the darkness night," allotting to each its own particular area and establishing limits for each right from the beginning so that they could keep to them permanently without interference. Everyone in his right mind can understand this, how from that time till this the light has not surpassed its limits, nor has darkness exceeded its due order, resulting in confusion and disruption. (35c) Really, this fact alone should suffice to oblige people obdurate in their lack of response to come to faith and obedience to the words of Sacred Scripture so as to imitate the order in the elements, respecting as they do their course uninterruptedly, and not overstep their own limitations but rather recognize the extent of their own nature.

(11) Then, when he had assigned to each its own name, he linked the two together in the words, "Evening came, and morning came: one day." He made a point of speaking of the end of the day and the end of the night as one, so as to grasp a certain order and sequence in visible things and avoid any impression of confusion.

(12) Now, we are in a position to learn from the Holy Spirit, through the tongue of this blessed author, (35d) what things were created on the first day and what things on the other days. This itself is a mark of the considerateness of the loving God. I mean, his all-powerful hand and boundless wisdom were not at a loss even to create everything in one day. Why say 'one day'? even in a brief moment. Yet it was not because of its utility to him that he produced anything that exists, since being self-sufficient he is in need of nothing. It was rather out of his loving kindness and goodness that he created everything; accordingly he created things in sequence and provided us with a clear instruction about created things through the tongue of the blessed author, so that we might learn about

them precisely and not fall into the error of those led by purely human reasoning. You see, if there are still those, despite this manner of creation, who say that things get existence from themselves, (36a) what would these people not have been rash enough to invent in their anxiety to say and do everything against their own welfare, had not God employed such considerateness and instruction?

(13) After all, what could be more pitiful and more stupid than people coming up with arguments like this, claiming that beings get existence of themselves, and withdrawing all creation from God's providence? How could you have the idea, I ask you, that so many elements and such great arrangement were being guided without anyone to supervise and control it all? Surely no ship ever managed to navigate the waves of the sea without a pilot, or soldier do brave deed with no general in command, or house stand firm with no householder in charge—whereas this immense universe (36b) and the design of all these elements could happen simply by chance without anyone present with the power to guide it all, controlling and maintaining all things in existence from his innate wisdom is this feasible?

(14) Yet why do we take further pains to demonstrate to those people what is obvious even, as the proverb has it, to the blind? Still, let us not neglect to propose the teaching of Scripture to them, making every effort to deliver them from error and lead them to truth. You see, even if they are caught up in error, the fact is nonetheless that they are people like ourselves, and it is proper for us to show every care for them, never relenting, demonstrating instead with great zeal all we have at our command, and providing them with an appropriate remedy so that at least eventually they may come to a truly healthy condition. (36c) Nothing, remember, is of such concern to God as the saving of souls. Paul makes no secret of it when he says, "He wants everybody to be saved and to come to the knowledge of truth;"¹⁶ and again God himself says, "I

¹⁶ 1 Tim 2:4.

have no wish for the death of the sinner—only for him to be converted and live.”¹⁷

(15) The reason, you see, that he produced all created things and formed us was not that we should perish nor to consign us to punishment, but to save us, to free us from error and reward us with the enjoyment of the kingdom. This, after all, is what he prepared for us, not at this late stage after our coming into existence, but before the foundation of the world, as he himself says: “Come, you blessed of my Father, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world.”¹⁸ (36d) See the loving kindness¹⁹ of the Lord, how even before creation, even before he produced human beings, he had prepared for them countless good things, revealing the extent of his care for our race and his wish for everyone to be saved.

(16) So, then, since we have such a Lord, so loving, so good, so gentle, let us give heed both to our own salvation and to that of our brethren. This, after all, will redound to our own salvation; not simply care for ourselves, but assistance to our neighbors as well, and conducting them to the way of truth. To learn how good a thing it is to make it possible for another to gain profit from our own welfare, listen to the biblical author speaking in the name of God: “The one who brings something noble out of dishonor will be like my own mouth.”²⁰ What does that mean? Whoever leads his neighbors from error towards truth, (37a) it is saying, or guides them from wickedness to virtue, imitates me as far as human nature can. God himself, remember, despite his divinity, took to himself our human flesh, and for no other reason than the salvation of the human race became man. Why say, he took our human flesh and endured every other human limitation, when the

17. Ez 18.23 in Chrysostom's somewhat abbreviated text.

18. Mt 25.34.

19. Another of Chrysostom's constant themes, the *philanthropia* of God; it recurs in all the homilies, and the closing doxology invariably acknowledges it. Its frequency says much for Chrysostom's own spirituality, which is never allowed to obtrude directly into these scriptural homilies.

20. Jer 15.19.

full truth is he accepted the cross so as to free us in our sinful bondage from the curse? This is what Paul is crying out about when he says, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for our sake."²¹ If, then, he, being God and enjoying that ineffable nature, out of unspeakable love accepted all that for us and for our salvation, what would we not be justified in demonstrating in the case of our brethren, members with us of the one body, (37b) so as to snatch them from the jaws of the devil and guide them to the way of truth? You see, as the soul is superior to the body, to the same degree should its needs be ranked above assistance to those in need of material things, and greater reward given when through encouragement and constant instruction people lead the slothful and the recalcitrant along the right path, showing them the ugliness of evil and the beauty of a good life lived for God.

(17) Accordingly, since we are familiar with all these matters, let us converse with our neighbors about saving their soul ahead of all the other concerns of their life, and awaken them to a care for that. I mean, it is highly desirable if by constantly being reminded of this the soul can be rescued from the abyss of wickedness in which our life is passed (37c) and if we can curb the revolt of the passions which ceaselessly war against it. For this reason we need great vigilance, since our struggle is unending and a truce is out of the question. Hence, in his letter to the Ephesians, Paul says, "Our contest is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities and powers, against the rulers of darkness of this world, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."²² Don't think, he is saying, the contest at hand for us is accidental: the struggle is not with our peers, nor are the conditions of battle equally balanced for us. I mean, we with our bodies to hinder us are engaged in combat with disembodied forces.

(18) Still, don't be frightened: you see, if the battle is unequal, great is the power of our arms. (37d) He reminded us

21. Gal 3.13.

22. Eph 6.12 with a slight textual variation in "darkness of this world."

of this as if to say: Since you know the nature of the foe, do not fail in your resolve, nor lose heart for the contest; on the contrary, "don the armor of God for the purpose of being able to resist the wiles of the devil."²³ His wiles, after all, are many, that is to say, the ways by which he endeavours to trip up the unwary; we should take care to recognize them so as to avoid the attempts he makes and to allow him no inroads. Instead, we should keep our tongue in check, our eyes away from danger and our mind pure, and be constantly at the ready for battle, as though some wild beast were pressing upon us and endeavouring to get the better of us.

(19) For this reason, that towering genius, the teacher of the gentiles, the whole world's tongue, who (38a) spared no pains when the salvation of his disciples was in question, has this to say: "Don the armor of God," and adds, in words that are meant for our protection from every quarter and that render us invincible: "Stand firm, then, your loins girt with truth, wearing the breastplate of faith, your feet shod in readiness to proclaim the gospel of peace, above all else taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the burning shafts of the evil one; take also the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, God's word."²⁴ See how he has armed every part of us? As if we were on the point of going into battle, he has protected firstly our loins so that we can run faster; then he put on the breastplate (38b) to prevent our being hit with spears, protected our feet, and armed us at all points with faith. Faith, he says, note faith will be able to quench the burning shafts of the evil one. What are the devil's shafts? Evil desires, unclean thoughts, deadly passions—lust, envy, jealousy, pride, hatred, avarice, and every other form of laxity. All these, he says, the sword of the Spirit can quell. Why say quell? It can remove the very head of the enemy. Do you see how he encouraged his disciples, how he rendered them tougher than steel after being softer than wax? You see, since our contest is not against flesh and blood but against incor-

23. Eph 6.11.

24. Eph 6.14–17, again with some textual individuality.

poreal powers, he has accordingly armed us with weapons not of the flesh (38c) but of the spirit, burnished to such an extent that the evil demon is powerless to resist their splendor.

(20) Armed therefore with these weapons, let us not tremble at the contest, flee the onset of battle, or prove fainthearted. After all, as long as we are on the alert, that evil demon would never get the better of our weapons' strength, provided we are intent on rendering his stratagems ineffectual. On the other hand, should we relax our vigilance, it will be all to no avail: the enemy of our salvation is ever on the watch and tries everything against our salvation. So let us protect ourselves from every quarter, exercising restraint in speech, refraining from any behavior likely to harm us, and along with abstinence from food (38d) and every other virtue let us give an example of generosity towards the poor in the knowledge of the great reward laid up for us from our care for them. Scripture says, remember, "The person who takes pity on the poor lodges a claim with God."²⁵ Notice how this lending operates in a strange way you would not expect: the one who takes the loan is different from the one who makes himself liable for it. Not only that, but also the fact that in this case of lending we incur no resentment or any other disadvantage. That is to say, he does not promise to give a hundred per cent on the loan, as is customary with us, but a hundred times the amount lent. Nor does he stop at that: this reward comes to us in this present life, and life everlasting in the hereafter. In this life, if anyone promised to return to us twice the amount lent, we would willingly make available all our possessions, (39a) despite all the resentment and all the wiles frequently encountered in greedy people.

(21) You know that many people of quite exalted standing renege on repayment of a loan, either resisting with bad grace or being unable to pay because of poverty, as often happens. But, in the case of the Lord of all, there is no room for thinking this; on the contrary, the loan is proof against loss, he guarantees to return in good time one hundredfold what was

25. Prov 19.17.

deposited, and he keeps in reserve for us life everlasting hereafter. So what excuse will be left to us in future if we are negligent and fail to gain a hundredfold in place of the little we have, the future in place of the present, the eternal in place of the temporal, heedlessly locking our money away behind doors and barricades, preferring to leave it lying idle instead of making it available to the needy now so as in the future to count on support from them? Scripture says, remember, (39b) "Make friends with ill-gotten gains so that, when you go down in the world, they may welcome you into their eternal dwellings."²⁶

(22) I know that many people are not heeding what I am saying; instead, they take it as stuff and nonsense, and give no attention to our words. For my part, I'm sorry about it and regret that nothing can reach people like that—not even life's experience, nor all that God promises, not even fear of what lies ahead, nor the instruction they receive from me each day. I will not desist from giving this kind of advice until I manage to win them over to a better state of mind, drawing them from their frenzied stupor which avarice brought upon them by dulling their intellect. I am confident, you see, confident that, with the grace of God, the persistence of our preaching (39c), and the careful attention that is a fruit of fasting, can release them even at this late hour from this crippling affliction and return them to perfect health; thus they will be freed from the punishment awaiting such people, and we can rid them of their faintheartedness, returning the glory for everything to the Father and the Son and Holy Spirit; now and forever, for ages of ages. Amen.

26. Lk 16.9.

HOMILY 4

"God said, 'Let a firmament be made in the middle of the water, and let it keep one body of water from the other.' This is what happened."¹



ITNESSING AS I DO, dearly beloved, your daily gathering here with such enthusiasm, I am filled with deep satisfaction, and I do not fail to praise the loving God for your progress. I mean, just as hunger is a sign of bodily health, (39d) so, too, interest in listening to the divine sayings would be taken by anyone as a sure pointer to spiritual well-being. Accordingly, our Lord Jesus Christ too, in the Beatitudes pronounced on the Mount, declared, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will have their fill."² So who could adequately commend you, now that you have already received this blessing from the Lord of all, and are looking forward to so many more good things from him? Our Lord, you see, is like that: when he sees a soul seeking the things of the Spirit with great desire and earnest zeal, he bestows on it his graces in abundance.

(2) Hence, with a view to your greater benefit, I, too, look forward to being the occasion of an instructive sermon that will lead to an increase (40a) in your love. I mean, for you and your improvement we undergo any effort so that you too may climb more rapidly to the heights of virtue and become teachers about life in God to all those who associate with you, and that we may feel comfortable in more forthright speech seeing that our effort was not in vain or to no purpose. On the con-

1. Gn 1.6. "Firmament" reflects the Greek and Latin versions' attempts to grapple with a difficult original notion. Chrysostom in commenting later in the homily on v.7 is unwilling to reach precision on its meaning.

2. Mt 5.6.

trary, this spiritual seed germinates day by day; what happened with the Sower in the Gospel has not happened in our case. You remember that in the parable one lot survived and three perished: the handful of seeds that were scattered along the road did not germinate, those that fell among thorns were strangled, and the others that were sown on stony ground and stayed on the surface were unable to bear any fruit, (40b) whereas finally through God's love we look forward to a yield from the seed that was sown on good ground—some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.³

(3) This increases our enthusiasm, this enlivens our understanding—to know that it is not idly or in vain that we are delivering our remarks, but that you welcome what we have to say with attentive hearing and alert minds. In saying this I am not flattering you, my dear people; I am simply gauging your enthusiasm from what was said yesterday. I mean, I could see you were all agog at the instruction given and made every effort lest by chance any part of the sermon should pass unheeded; in particular, the flood of applause was eloquent testimony of the favor my words found with you. When someone listens to the spoken word willingly, obviously it is riveted in his memory; he stores it up in the recesses of his mind and makes sure it does not escape him. (40c) So, too, who could worthily praise you or bless us for preaching to willing ears? Scripture says, remember, "Blessed is the one who preaches to willing ears."⁴ This is one of the fruits of fasting, this is a remedy which works towards the salvation of our souls. And if in the beginning, and from the introduction, this strength is revealed, how much greater do you suppose the benefit will be in the days to come? Just be sure, I beseech you, to "work out your salvation with fear and trembling"⁵ and allow the enemy no way of undermining your salvation. Remember that it drives him to distraction to see the spiritual riches you now have, and he prowls around like a roaring lion seeking some-

3. Cf. Mt 13.3-8.

4. Sir 25.9 in a variant of the LXX.

5. Phil 2.12.

one to devour.⁶ But if you are careful, he will, with the grace of God, wreak no harm.

(4) This is the kind of spiritual armor, after all, (40d) with which the grace of the Spirit has clad us, as we taught you, my dear people, yesterday. So if we are constantly protected in all our limbs with this armor, none of the shafts aimed by the enemy will be able to strike us; instead, they will return to him unsuccessful. The grace of God, you see, makes us stronger than steel and quite invincible, if we want it so. So just as anyone who strikes steel does the steel no harm but only impairs his own strength, and anyone kicking out at spurs bloodies his own feet, so too in our case will things turn out badly for the enemy of our salvation, provided we protect ourselves constantly with the armor supplied us from the grace of the Spirit. I mean, such is its efficacy that the enemy could not resist the brightness emanating from it; instead, his eyes would be blinded (41a) by its brilliance. So let us arm ourselves completely, I beg you, with this armor, and in this guise go out in public, mix with our friends, and engage in business. Why say in public? Let us also bear this protection when coming together in church, returning home, sleeping and waking, and never lay it aside throughout our whole life; after all, it travels with us, and proves a great basis for our confidence wherever we go. You see, it doesn't weigh our body down like material armor; on the contrary, it brightens it, makes it nimble and increases its strength—provided we keep it so clean day by day that the shining beams of its radiance blind the eyes of the evil demon (41b) who stops at nothing to undermine our salvation.

(5) Well, now, since we have armed you sufficiently, let us lay before you the customary meal. Let us propose to you, dear people, what follows the part commented on yesterday, and have as our wonderful host again blessed Moses, great author that he is and spokesman of this beautiful doctrine. So let us see what it is he wants to teach us today and attend closely to his words. After all, it is not by his own power he speaks; in-

6. Cf. 1 Pt 5, 8.

stead, whatever the grace of the Spirit inspires in him, this he utters with his own tongue for the instruction of humankind.⁷ Having thus completed the account of the first day, and having said after the creation of light, "Evening came, and morning came: one day," he says further, (41c) "And God said 'Let a firmament be made in the middle of the water, and let it keep one body of water separate from the other.'" Notice here, dearly beloved, the sequence of the teaching. What I mean is that he first brought to our attention, after the creation of heaven and earth, the fact that "the earth was invisible and lacking all shape," and supplied the explanation for it—namely, it was invisible because it was concealed by darkness and water (you recall that everything consisted of darkness and water, and nothing else).⁸ Then, at the command of the Lord, light was created and a separation made between light and darkness; one received the name day and the other night. His intention once again is to teach us that just as by producing the light God could cleave the darkness and assigned to each its appropriate name, so by his command he made a division in the mass of water.

(6) (41d) Take note of such ineffable power, which surpasses all human imagining. I mean, he simply commands, and one element comes into being while another gives way to it. "God said, "Let a firmament be made in the middle of the water, and let it keep one body of water separate from the other.'" What does that mean, "Let a firmament be made"? As if someone were to say in human language, Let there be some sort of barrier and division to come between them and make a separation. And, so that you may learn the extraordinary obedience of the elements and the exceeding power of the Creator, he adds, "This is what happened." God had only to speak, and the effect followed immediately.

7. Chrysostom is utterly convinced of the inspiration of Scripture and of the role of its human and divine authors. This phrasing occurs over and over again, together with the closing reference to the saving purpose of scriptural inspiration. Cf. *St. John Chrysostom's Teaching on Inspiration in his Old Testament Homilies* 84–94.

8. As was remarked on v.2 in Homily 2, Chrysostom is content with this unlikely reading, "invisible," ignorant as he is of the Heb. text.

(7) The text goes on: "God made the firmament, and God divided the water which was below the firmament from the water which was above the firmament."⁹ That is to say, once the firmament existed, he ordered some of the water (42a) to go below the firmament, and some to be on top of the firmament. Now, what would you say this means, the firmament? Water that has congealed, or some air that has been compressed, or some other substance? No sensible person would be rash enough to make a decision on it. Instead, it is better to be quite grateful and ready to accept what is told us and not reach beyond the limits of our own nature by meddling in matters beyond us, but rather to know only the simple fact and keep it within us—namely, that by the Lord's command the firmament was produced, causing division of the waters, keeping some below and being able to carry the rest elevated on top of it.

(8) "The Lord called the firmament heaven."¹⁰ Notice how Sacred Scripture here too employs the same sequence of thought. Just as it said yesterday, "Let there be light," (42b) and after it was created added, "Let there be separation between light" and darkness, and thus the light was called day, so too today it said, "Let a firmament be made in the middle of the water." Then, as with the light, so too here it taught us the use of the firmament, saying, "for the purpose of keeping one body of water separate from the other." And when it made its use clear to us, as it had imposed a name on the light, so too it put a label on the firmament: "He called the firmament heaven," as we saw. How is it, you will say, some people want to claim many heavens were created? They don't get this teaching from Sacred Scripture, but base it on their own reasoning. I mean, blessed Moses teaches us nothing more than this; that is, he says, "In the beginning (42c) God made heaven and earth;" then, having taught us the reason why the earth happened to be invisible—that it was concealed by darkness and the waters of the abyss—he employs a kind of order and sequence by saying after the creation of light, "The Lord said,

9. Gn 1:7.

10. Gn 1:8.

"Let a firmament be made." He then taught us in a precise manner the purpose of the firmament in saying, "so as to keep one body of water from the other," and next gave the name heaven to this same firmament which caused division of the waters. So after this kind of teaching who could take any notice of the people who want to speak off the cuff from their own imagining and be so bold as to propose many heavens against the evidence of Sacred Scripture? But, they claim, see how blessed David sang the praises of God in words like these: "Praise him, heaven of heavens."¹¹ Don't worry, dearly beloved, don't think Sacred Scripture ever contradicts itself, (42d) learn instead the truth of what it says, hold fast what it teaches in truth, and close your ears to those who speak against it.

(9) To grasp the point I'm trying to make, listen very carefully so as not to be easily upset by people prepared to say the first thing that comes into their head. All the sacred books of the Old Testament were originally composed in Hebrew; everybody would agree with us on this. Not many years before the coming of Christ, King Ptolemy, who was very keen on collecting books and had collected many other ones of different kinds, felt obliged to add the Old Testament books to his collection as well. So he summoned some of the Jews living in Jerusalem, and ordered them to translate the books into Greek; this was in fact brought to completion for him.¹² The upshot of this work of divine providence was that (43a) the benefit of the Old Testament was now available not only to people who knew Hebrew but also to anyone living anywhere in the world. What makes this remarkable and ironic is that the initiative for this was taken not by people with belief in Judaism but by a man devoted to idols and opposed in his beliefs to true religion. You see, everything turns out like this

11. Ps 148.4.

12. In relaying the legend of the formation of the LXX, Chrysostom shows his uncritical attitude that emerges constantly—as well, perhaps, his judgement that homilies were not the occasion for troubling his simple (?) congregation with scholarly niceties. Cf. Introduction 15.

under the providence of our Lord: the principles of truth are always vindicated by the people who oppose them.

(10) It was not without purpose that I told this story to you; rather, it was for you, dearly beloved, to know that the Old Testament books were not composed in this language—ours, I mean—but in Hebrew. Now, those with a precise knowledge of that language tell us that among the Hebrews the word ‘heaven’ is used in the plural, (43b) and those who know the language of the Syrians confirm this.¹³ In that language—that is, the language they use—no one would say ‘heaven’, but ‘the heavens’. So it is logical that the words spoken by the blessed David, “the heaven of heavens,” have that form, not because there are several heavens (the blessed Moses, remember, taught us that) but because it is idiomatic in Hebrew to use the name of a single thing in the plural; if there were several heavens, the Holy Spirit would not have neglected to teach us through the tongue of this blessed author about the creation of the other ones. Keep a close grasp on these matters, I beg you, so as to be able to curb those people wanting to come up with objections against the Church, and be quite sure in your knowledge of the efficacy of what is contained in the Sacred Scriptures. (43c) That, after all, is the reason why you gather here so regularly, and why we provide you with such abundant instruction, so that you may be well prepared for anyone seeking to indoctrinate you.

(11) But let us move on to what follows, if you don’t mind. “God called the firmament heaven,” the text says; “and God saw that it was good.” Notice the extent of the considerateness of the language to accommodate human limitations. That is to say, just as at the creation of light the text said, “He saw it was good,” so too now in the case of heaven—that is, the firmament—it says, “God saw it was good,” teaching us in this way its extraordinary beauty. I mean, who could fail to be utterly amazed that the firmament in all this period has kept its

13. Chrysostom thus admits his ignorance of the original language of the OT—significant for a commentator on *Genesis*. His own instructor in exegesis, Diodore of Tarsus, was similarly handicapped. Cf. Introduction 3 & 15.

beauty unimpaired, and that the more time passes, so much the more this beauty increases. (43d) After all, what could be more beautiful than the thing that gains commendation from the Creator? I mean, if we see a human being's work brought to completion and marvel at its design, its position, its beauty, its proportion, its symmetry, and everything else about it, how could anyone adequately praise what God has produced, particularly when it has won the praise of the Lord himself? You see, this is said out of considerateness for us, and you will notice the same words used in the case of each created thing, refuting in anticipation the temerity of those who later will be disposed to sharpen their tongue against God's creation and raise the question, why did this and that come into being? So, to check those people ahead of time in their endeavours to voice that opinion, the text says, "God saw that it was good." When you hear that God "saw" and God "praised", (44a) take the word in a sense proper to God. That is to say, the Creator knew the beauty of the created thing before he created it, whereas we are human beings and encompassed with such limitations that we cannot understand it in any other way; accordingly, he directed the tongue of the blessed author to make use of the clumsiness of these words for the instruction of the human race.¹⁴

(12) So, whenever you raise your eyes and admire the beauty of heaven, its immensity, its usefulness to us, then move from there to its creator, as a wise man has said: "From the magnitude and beauty of creatures we can by comparison see the creator."¹⁵ See too the Lord's power, how great it is, even from the creation of these elements. I mean, any right-minded person who is prepared to scan visible things each day—but why say created things each day? (44b) if you only consider carefully your own makeup, you will see through these details God's ineffable power beyond all description. If these visible

14. Chrysostom thus sets out his profound understanding of the Scriptures as exemplifying both divine considerateness (*synkatabasis*) for human limitations (*astheneia*—not "weakness") and also divine transcendence. It is a typically Eastern and specifically Antiochene understanding.

15. Wis 13:5.

things suffice to teach us the magnitude of the Creator's power, and if you attain to the unseen powers, and raise your mind to the hosts of the angels, the archangels, the powers above, the thrones, the dominations, the principalities, the powers, the cherubim, the seraphim—what understanding, what description is of any avail to unfold his greatness? Remember the blessed author David: if in studying the order of visible things he cried out, "How your works are magnified, O Lord; you have made everything in wisdom"¹⁶—David, a man endowed so generously with the Spirit and deemed worthy to know the obscure and hidden things of the Lord's wisdom—(44c) what could we say, dust and ashes that we are, obliged constantly to move with head bowed, and to gape at the unspeakable love of the Lord of all? And why do I quote the psalmist? I mean, blessed Paul, that spirit soaring to heaven, clad in a body yet contending with disembodied powers, treading the earth yet scouring the heavens in his enthusiasm, falling in with one part of God's design (I mean that to do with Jews and Gentiles, rejected by the former and taken possession of by the latter)—Paul it was who cried out in utter bewilderment and stupor, "O the depth of the wealth of God's wisdom and knowledge: how inscrutable his judgements and unsearchable his ways."¹⁷

(13) Now, on this matter, I would address to those rash enough to be inquisitive about the generation of the Son of God (44d) and anxious to undermine the status of the Holy Spirit the following mild enquiry: whence springs the vehemence of your daring, I ask you? what drunken stupor leads you to rush into such extreme folly? After all, if a man of such ability and stature as Paul says God's judgements—that is, his planning and government—are inscrutable (he did not say incomprehensible, just inscrutable, so that no one could plot them), and God's ways, in his words, are unsearchable, meaning the same thing, referring to his dispositions and com-

16. Ps 104.24.

17. Rom 11.33. Even in a *Genesis* commentary, Chrysostom does not conceal his great admiration and fellow-feeling for Paul. He sees him as "the world's teacher" and in prophetic insight extols a man who can suffer for his principles.

mands as ways, how is it that you are rash enough to be inquisitive about the very being of the Only-begotten and to minimize as far as you can the status of the Holy Spirit?¹⁸ Observe, dearly beloved, how wrong it is not to attend precisely to the contents of Sacred Scripture. I mean, if these people accepted the teachings from Sacred Scripture with the proper dispositions and didn't invent their own from their own reasoning, (45a) they would never have been caught in such folly. Let us then, on the contrary, use the same persistence in making the teachings of Sacred Scripture ring in their ears, while stopping our own ears to their baleful doctrines.

(14) Now, I have no idea how we came to be drawn from the theme of our sermon into that distraction and lose the thread; so we must pick up the sermon again by retracing our steps. The text says: "God called the firmament heaven, and God saw that it was good. Evening came and morning came: a second day." After giving the firmament its name and commending what had been created, he brought the second day to a close, and said, "Evening came and morning came, a second day." See how he teaches us with precision, calling the end of the light evening and the end of the night morning, (45b) and naming the whole period day lest we be misled into thinking the evening is the end of the day, instead of having a clear understanding that one day comprises the duration of both parts. Thus it would be correct to say that evening is the end of the light; but daybreak, that is, the end of the night, is the duration of a day. This, after all, is what Scripture wants to indicate by saying, "Evening came and morning came: a second day."

(15) Perhaps we have drawn out the point to great length, no longer in control of the subject but swept along, you might say, by the very sequence of the words as though by a wild tor-

18. Chrysostom's editors from De Montfaucon note his ready polemic against trinitarian heretics of the day, especially the Anomians (Grk. *anomos*, "unlike, unequal"). For a recent survey of contemporary movements, cf. Y. Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* I, English translation (London 1983) 73-84.

rent. You are responsible for this through your willing attention to what we say. I mean, nothing can so spur the preacher and stimulate him to greater fertility of thought as the enthusiasm of his listeners. (45c) Just as listeners who are recalcitrant and listless reduce even an able speaker to lethargy, so it happens that, by the grace of God and despite our being dumber than stones, you have been enough to rouse our sluggish mind, dissipate our torpor, and drive us on to say something or other useful to you and directed to your edification. Since, then, you have the good fortune to be taught by God, and according to blessed Paul you are capable also of advising others,¹⁹ come now, I beg you, especially at this period of fasting give much attention to good living in God's designs, and don't let our sermons leave you untouched if we preach to you each day on the same topics; after all, to quote the blessed Paul, repetition is no burden to me, and it is a precaution for you.²⁰ Our soul, remember, is sluggish and needs constant reminders. (45d) Just as this body of ours requires each day its bodily nourishment so as not to develop extreme weakness and be unable to exert itself, so too our soul needs spiritual nourishment and excellent regimen if it is to develop a certain affinity with good and remain unvanquished in the struggle against the wiles of the evil one.

(16) Accordingly, let us each day be concerned with the value of this exercise, let us scrutinize our conduct and not lose heart; let us render an account to ourselves both of what comes in and of what goes out—what we utter that is of some use and what words we pronounce to no effect, and again what value there is to our soul in what we receive through hearing and likewise what has the capacity to harm in what we are responsible for. Let us impose some rules and regulations on our tongue so as initially to keep a check (46a) on our speech and only then deliver what we have to say. Let us train our mind not to give vent to harmful thoughts; instead, should something of that kind gain entry from outside, banish it as

19. Cf. Rom 15.14.

20. Phil 3.1.

unnecessary and likely to cause harm, or if it rises inside us, expel it rapidly with a pious thought, and let us not think that fasting only till evening suffices for our salvation.

(17) After all, if the loving Lord said to the hardhearted Jews through the prophet: "Behold those seventy years: surely it was not for me that you kept that fast? And if you eat and drink, is it not for yourselves that you eat and drink? This is what the Lord, mighty ruler, says: Deliver just judgements, show mercy and pity each of you to your neighbor, do not oppress widow or orphan, sojourner or poor person, (46b) and let none of you plot evil against your brother in your heart."²¹ In other words, if those people sitting in darkness and caught up in the shadow of error gained no benefit merely from fasting without performing those other good works or expelling from their heart evil intended against their neighbor, what sort of excuse can we offer of whom more is required—not simply commanded to abstain from that, but even obliged to love our enemies and be kind to them? And why do I say 'be kind'? Also to pray for them, and beseech the Lord and implore his providence in their behalf. After all, this most of all will be a recommendation for us on that fearful day, and our best insurance against our sins, if we are disposed in this way towards our enemies. (46c) I mean, even if the commandment is exceedingly rigorous, provided you keep in mind the prize laid up for those who do right, it will seem nothing at all, even though it is in fact very rigorous. Why is that? Scripture says: "If you do this, you will be like my father in heaven."²² To make the point clearer to us, it added: "Because he makes his sun rise on the evil and the good"; that is, it is saying, you are imitating God as far as human beings can. I mean, just as he makes the sun rise not only on the just but also on those who do evil, and provides rain and seasonal storms not only to the good but also to the evil, so you too, if you love not only those who love you but also those badly disposed to you, are imitating your Lord as far as you can.

21. Zec 7:5,6,9,10.

22. Cf. Mt 5:45.

(18) (46d) Do you see how he has elevated to the highest pinnacle the person capable of achieving this virtue? Don't, however, think only of the difficulty of the matter, dearly beloved, but consider first of all in your heart the great dignity you would stand to gain; and let the opportunity for dignity make light for you of what is heavy and burdensome. Should you not, after all, recognize the grace given you in finding an opportunity through your kindness to your enemy of having opened for you the doors to a confident approach to God and of making atonement for your sins? Do you, perchance, on the contrary, relish the prospect of taking vengeance on your enemy and repaying in kind and even worse the one badly disposed to you? What advantage will that be when you gain no benefit from it and are liable to undergo punishment for it in that dread tribunal for breaking its laws? Tell me: if some (47a) earthly king made it a law to look after one's enemies under punishment of death, would not everyone for fear of this bodily death hasten to fulfil the law? So what a dreadful accusation does that person deserve who, because of bodily death (which in any event the necessity of nature brings us without exception), is ready to do anything with death in mind—hardly a source of encouragement—but thinks less of the law made by the Lord of all.

(19) While speaking on this subject, however, I have forgotten those who do not even show the same love to those who love them. Who then will eventually snatch us from that punishment when we are not simply far from fulfilling that commandment (47b) but don't do even what the publicans do? Scripture says: "If you love those who love you, what great deed is that? Do not even the publicans do that?"²³ Since therefore this is not done by us, what prospect of salvation is there for us? So, I beg you, let us not be lacking in compassion, but let us instead subdue our thoughts, and first learn to surpass our neighbor in love and, according to the blessed Paul, to regard others as more eminent in dignity than our-

23. Mt 5.46 in Chrysostom's variant text.

selves;²⁴ not to resist being diminished but wanting to overcome; not to dominate but to provide a clearer and warmer affection for those who love us. After all, this it is that especially sustains and reinforces our life, and in this we are distinguished from the brutes and beasts, namely, (47c) being able if we wish to maintain the order appropriate to us and to manifest a warm fellow-feeling towards our neighbors; next, to restrain our thinking, and to crush the wild and unruly creature—madness I call it—and remind it of the trial before the dread tribunal and teach it that, should peace be made with our enemies, we will win great reward, whereas if discord still continues, we will undergo a severe judgement. In other words, we should not squander the time idly and to no purpose but, day by day, and hour by hour, keep before our eyes the Lord's judgment, and the thought of what things are calculated to produce great confidence in us and what will only increase our punishment.

(20) Turning these things over (47d) in our mind like this, let us get the better of our feelings, restrain the impulses of the flesh, and mortify, as the blessed Paul puts it, "what is earthly in you, immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire," anger, covetousness, vainglory, slander.²⁵ If we render ourselves dead to these desires, so that they cannot work in us, we shall be able to receive the fruit of the Spirit, which is "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control."²⁶ Let this be the difference between the Christian and the unbeliever; let these be our talisman, let us not simply bear the name like an ornament, nor boast only of appearances; nay rather, even should we possess those virtues (48a) we have enumerated, let us not then boast, but so much the more humble ourselves. Scripture says, after all, "When you have done all these things, say, We are unprofitable servants."²⁷ If it proves true that we have taken such care and given thought to our salvation, we will be able to gain the greatest benefit, rescue ourselves from eventual punishment,

24. Phil 2.3.

26. Gal 5.22-23.

25. Cf. Col 3.5-8.

27. Lk 17.10.

and become in the eyes of onlookers teachers of what works for their good. So we will pass this present life with care and be judged worthy of loving kindness in the life to come, which it will hopefully be our lot to experience, and the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father be glory, power and honor for ages of ages. Amen.

HOMILY 5

"God said: 'Let the water under heaven be gathered together into one mass, and let dry land appear.'"¹



COME NOW, DEARLY BELOVED, (48b) today also let us set before you the feast that comes from the words of the blessed Moses, and observe carefully what was created by the Lord on the third day. To begin with an example: men digging in gold-bearing soil, when they spy some seams of gold dust, don't stop until they have broken the seams open, got right to the very bottom of it and taken from the spot great wealth.² So much the more should we, who have no intention of searching for gold dust but are expecting to find ineffable treasure, seek it daily so as to gain great wealth from the spiritual plenty to be found here, and so return home. (48c) After all, in the former case material wealth often brought dangers to the people gaining it, and provided only brief enjoyment before it disappeared altogether and the dangers set in, either from attacks by slanderers, or robbers, or burglars, or house guards who turned to theft and absconded.

(2) In the present case, on the contrary, there is no fear of anything like that; I mean, this spiritual treasure is proof against theft: when it is stored in the recesses of our mind, it is secure against every stratagem, provided we don't become slothful and give entry to the one anxious to deprive us of it. Our enemy, remember (I mean the wicked demon), when he sees spiritual wealth accumulated, grinds his teeth, and rages, and displays great vigilance so as to take advantage of the

1. Gn 1.9.

2. Cf. Homily 3, note 3 above for these traditional analogies of Chrysostom's.

right moment (48d) to steal something of what we have within us. No such moment will suit his convenience provided we are not guilty of sloth; it behoves us therefore to remain constantly on the alert and to impede his every approach. If, in fact, he sees us awake and displaying great vigilance and he attacks us once or twice only to find his efforts are to no avail, he will eventually be shamed into giving up in the knowledge that there is nothing further he can do in the face of our resistance. Accordingly, as we realize that we cannot avoid being at war all our life here below, so let us arm ourselves, on the understanding that we have the enemy always at our door, and mount guard unremittingly so as not to give him opportunity for assault by relaxing our vigilance a little once or twice.

(3) Have you noticed (49a) how much provision people with many possessions make for their protection when they expect an enemy attack? Some lock them up behind doors and bars, taking every precaution; others hide them underground so as to escape all detection. We should in fact follow the same procedure in amassing the wealth of virtue: we should guard it with great care, not expose it to the gaze of all but conceal it in the inmost recesses of our heart, and thus repel all the attacks of the one anxious to despoil us of it; in this way we will keep it intact and be able to leave this life with some resource for the life hereafter. Think of people who happen to be living in a foreign land: when they have in mind to return home, for a long time beforehand they begin to develop an enthusiasm and take pains to collect enough provisions (49b) to enable them to last the length of the journey so as not to fall victim to hunger. It should be exactly like this in our case: forced to live here below like people in a strange land (and in fact we are all strangers and foreigners in that regard) we should really be on the lookout for the resources that come from spiritual behavior and store them up for the journey, so that whenever the Lord bids us set out for our true homeland, we may be ready and may bring some of those resources with us and have the rest sent on ahead. Such, after all, is the nature of these resources: what we would wish to store up for ourselves

through the performance of these good deeds arrives there before us and opens the doors of confidence for us with the Lord, smoothing the entrance for us in advance so that we enter with great peace of mind and encounter much goodwill from the judge.

(4) To learn, dearly beloved, (49c) that this is the way these things happen, consider, I ask you, that the person who practises almsgiving in generous measure and lives his life on earth in the strength of a good conscience will find when he passes on from here great kindness at the hands of the judge, and will hear those blessed words among the rest, "Come, you whom my Father has blessed, and inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, because I was hungry and you gave me something to eat."³ You would find the very same to be true in the case of the other virtues. It will prove to be true with the confession of sins, and with prayers said in earnestness. You see, when in this present life we are able to wipe away our offenses through confession and find pardon from the Lord, we go from there cleansed of our sins, and we find great (49d) confidence given us. By the same token it is impossible for someone not cleansed of his sins in this life to find consolation afterwards in the next. Scripture says, remember, "In the underworld who will confess his faith in you?"⁴ And rightly so; after all, this is the time of contests, struggles and conflicts, whereas that will be the time for rewards, prizes and laurels. So let us strive while we are still engaged in the arena so that, when it comes to the time that we would be due to receive the laurels and the reward of effort, we may be found not amongst the disgraced but amongst those confidently receiving the crown upon their head.

(5) It is not idly or to no purpose that we propose these matters to you in your goodness; instead, our intention is day by day to bring to your mind good deeds so that you may be found perfect and well prepared (50a) and conspicuous for virtue in daily living. Thus you will be above reproach or contamination as blameless children of God, and will "shine as

3. Mt 25:34-35.

4. Ps 6:5.

lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, as our pride and joy, as you await the day of the Lord,"⁵ so that merely by your comportment you will benefit those with whom you associate: by sharing in converse with you they will partake also of the spiritual fragrance that accompanies you, and of your excellent way of life. After all, the company of rogues is bound to affect those who mix with them, as the blessed Paul says, "Evil association corrupts good manners;"⁶ and in just the same way the company of good people benefits those who frequent them.

(6) Accordingly, the loving Lord has allowed the good to live amongst the wicked so that these latter may gain something from their company, and may not persist forever in their evil-doing but may instead be brought to their senses by the sight of good people and profit somewhat from their company. (50b) So great, you see, is the power of virtue that even those who don't possess it revere it greatly and pay it great tribute. By the same token, in fact, evil in its turn is constantly under attack even by those who exemplify it themselves, so plain and obvious is it to everyone, and you won't find anyone quick to own up to it; instead, the remarkable thing is that the evil things they strive to perpetrate in fact, these they often condemn in word and prefer most people didn't know about. This is a mark of God's loving kindness, which he has shown in the case of humankind, that he has implanted in each of us a conscience that is above distortion, able to distinguish truly evil actions from those that aren't. This has the effect of robbing us of any plea that we fell into sin through ignorance instead of sloth of spirit and neglect of virtue.⁷

(7) Let us hour by hour turn these thoughts over in our mind (50c) and keep our own salvation [to the] foremost in our thinking, lest with the passage of time we forget ourselves and fall into the greatest disaster.

5. Phil 2.15-16.

6. 1 Cor 15.33, where Paul, of course, is quoting the pagan dramatist Menander.

7. Again *rhathumia*, "indifference, sloth," is the capital sin for Chrysostom. Cf. Homily 1, note 18 above.

(8) But enough of such introductions; let us now listen, if you don't mind, to what it is the grace of the Spirit wants to teach us today as well through Moses' tongue. The text goes on: "God said, 'Let the water under heaven be gathered together into one mass, and let dry land appear.' This is what happened." Notice here, I ask you, dearly beloved, the order and wonderful sequence. I mean, it said in the beginning that "the earth was invisible and lacking all shape" for the reason that it was concealed by the darkness and the waters; then on the second day he ordered the firmament to be made, and caused the separation of the waters, calling the firmament heaven. Now he further teaches us that on the third day he directed that the water under heaven (50d) that is, under the firmament—should come together into one mass, should make room, and the dry land should appear; that is what happened. In other words, since everything was filled with water, he orders the immensity of waters to come together into one mass, so that there would be a way for the dry land to appear.

(9) Note how he sets out for us in detail the orderly arrangement and beauty of it all. "That is what happened," it says. How? In the way the Lord directed. He simply spoke, and the work followed. You see, this is God's way: created things are governed by his will. "The water under heaven was gathered together into its masses, and the dry land appeared."⁸ Just as in the case of the light, when darkness was everywhere, he ordered the creation of the light, and caused a division between the light and the darkness, so as to assign one to the day and the other to the night, and likewise in the case of the waters he created the firmament, (51a) and bade one lot take the upper place and the other lot be below the firmament, so too in this case he orders this second lot of water which was under the firmament to run together into one mass so that the dry land may appear and he may then give it its own name, as with the light and the darkness. The text says, remember, "The waters were gathered together into

8. The LXX, in adding this additional explanatory sentence, is departing from most Heb. Mss.

their masses, and the dry land appeared; God called the dry land earth." Do you see, dearly beloved, how the earth, which was previously invisible and lacking all shape through being hidden by the waters as though under covers, he unveils, as it were, and shows its face at long last, giving it its own name.

(10) The text goes on: "The masses of the waters he called seas."⁹ Notice that the waters also got their own name. To make a comparison: when a first-rate craftsman plans to fashion a vessel from his own skill, he doesn't give it a name until he has brought his creation to completion. (51b) Just so, the loving Lord does not give names to the elements until he assigns them to their own place through his own arrangement. So after the earth received its own name and took its own shape, the waters too being now gathered together were in their turn ready to receive their own name. The text says, remember, "The masses of the waters he called seas," and then added, "God saw that it was good." You see, since human nature is limited and is not capable of adequately praising the works of God, Sacred Scripture anticipates by telling us of the praise given by the Creator himself. So, when you learn that created things appeared good to the Creator himself, you have further grounds for wonder without being able any better to apply praise and eulogy. This, after all, is the kind of Lord you have: he does the kinds of things that surpass the bounds of praise by us. (51c) I mean, how could human nature adequately praise God's works or celebrate them at all?

(11) Recognize further, I ask you, in the evidence assembled here the ineffable wisdom of God the artificer. That is to say, after making visible to us the face of the earth, he further bestows upon it by his own design a pleasing aspect, beautifying its face with a profusion of seeds. "God said," the text goes on, "'Let the earth put forth a crop of vegetation, plants yielding seed, each according to its kind and likeness, and fruit trees bearing fruit with seed inside, each according to its kind upon the earth.' This is what happened."¹⁰ What does that mean,

9. Gn 1.10b.

10. Gn 1.11.

"This is what happened"? According to the text, the Lord gave directions and at once the earth went into labor and adorned itself with its own crop of seeds. "The earth brought forth," the text goes on, "a crop of vegetation, plants yielding seed, each according to its kind and likeness, (51d) and fruit trees bearing fruit with seed inside, each according to its kind upon the earth."¹¹

(12) Consider here, I ask you, dearly beloved, how everything came into being on the earth by the word of the Lord. I mean, it was no man who was the cause, or plough, or help from oxen, or effort towards it from any other source—simply that everything heard the command, and at once sprang from the earth into view. From this we learn that at present likewise what provides us with the harvest of fruits is not the effort of the farmers, or their toil, or the other labors put into farming, but before all these it is the word of God, the same as was directed to it from the beginning. For the particular purpose of correcting later human folly, Sacred Scripture gives us a precise description of everything according to the order of creation so as to offset the absurdities of people speaking idly from their own reasoning in an endeavor to assert (52a) that the assistance of the sun is responsible for the germination of the crops.

(13) There are some people who try to ascribe these things to some of the stars. For this reason the Holy Spirit teaches us that before the creation of these elements the earth heard his word and command and brought forth the plants, with no need of anything else by way of assistance. In other words, in place of anything else the earth had need only of that word that was spoken, "Let the earth put forth a crop of vegetation." So, taking our lead from Sacred Scripture, let us never tolerate those who lightly propound contrary views. I mean, even if human beings till the earth, even if they get assistance from brute beasts, and bestow great attention on the earth,

11. In these verses, Gn 1.11–12, Chrysostom follows closely the (rather inconsistent) wording of the LXX, which is not that of the Heb. Masoretic text.

even if the weather is kind, and everything goes according to plan, it will be all to no avail unless the Lord wills; (52b) all the toil and trouble will be fruitless unless the hand from on high takes part and brings to fruition these efforts. Who could fail to be absolutely astonished at the thought of how the word uttered by the Lord, ““Let the earth put forth a crop of vegetation,”” penetrated to the very bowels of the earth and, as though with a veil, adorned the face of the earth with a variety of flowers? In an instant you could see the earth, which just before had been shapeless and unkempt, take on such beauty as almost to defy comparison with heaven. I mean, just as heaven would shortly be adorned with a variety of stars, so too the earth was beautified with a range of flowers to such an extent that even the Creator was moved to commendation: “God saw,” the text says, remember, “that it was good.”

(14) Does it occur to you how in the case of each of the created realities the text shows (52c) the Creator rendering praise, with the result that later human beings learn from this and pass from the creatures to the Creator? That is to say, if created things are of such a kind that they overwhelm human beings, and no one could adequately praise them, what could anyone say about the Creator himself? The text says: “God saw that it was good. Evening came, and morning came: a third day.”¹² Do you see how by the repetition of the teaching it wants to impress on our understanding the force of the words? “Evening came, and morning came: a third day.” You see, there was need to mention: A third day had passed. But see how in the case of each day it speaks this way: “Evening came, and morning came: a third day”—not idly or to no purpose, but to prevent our confusing the order, and thinking that with evening falling the day came to an end, instead of realizing (52d) that the evening is the end of the light and the beginning of night, whereas the dawn is the end of the night and the completion of the day. This in fact is what the blessed Moses wants to teach us in saying, “Evening came, and morn-

12. Gn 1.13.

ing came: a third day." Don't be surprised, dearly beloved, if Sacred Scripture repeats this over and over again.¹³ After all, even despite such insistence the Jews, who were already victims of error and hardened in heart, are bent on disputation by considering that the evening is the beginning of the following day; they deceive themselves and argue illogically, they still sit in darkness despite the clarity of the truth to everybody, they keep close to a lantern despite the fact that the sun spreads its rays of justice everywhere—so who could have resisted the obduracy of such idiots had there not been an exposition of teaching like this in great detail?

(15) (53a) But let them reap the reward of their own insanity. We, for our part, who have been fortunate enough to benefit from the rays of the sun, should obey the teaching of Sacred Scripture; let us follow *its* canon, place *its* wholesome doctrines within the recesses of our mind, and with protection *from it* take good care of our own welfare, avoiding whatever impairs the health of our soul and abstaining from all such harmful notions in the same way as we would noxious drugs. After all, the harm they inflict is much worse—worse, in fact, to the degree that the soul is more important than the body. You see, the death these drugs cause is for the body only, whereas things that impair the health of the soul bring to us a death that is eternal. What are these things that injure us? They are many and varied, (53b) but especially having regard for human esteem and not knowing how to scorn it. I mean, this proves a source of many evils for us: if we have any spiritual riches, this exhausts them and makes us bereft of any benefit from them. So what could be more harmful than this injury? It has the effect of depriving us of whatever we seem to have. Thus the pharisee in the Gospel turned out to be inferior to the publican: instead of keeping control of his

13. Chrysostom is committed, as we have seen above (Homily 2, note 6), to his principle of the precision of Scripture and to the fact that no detail of the text, repetitious though it may seem, is without purpose and value. Though this conviction is rooted in his belief in the inspiration of Scripture, and ultimately in the Incarnation, at times he seems obliged to rationalize in order to maintain his principle.

tongue, through it as through a door he poured out all his wealth.¹⁴ That's how bad vainglory is.

(16) Tell me, after all, why and for what reason do you have regard for the praise of human beings? Don't you know that their praise evaporates and disappears into thin air just like a shadow or something even less substantial? (53c) Human beings are extraordinarily unreliable and inconstant: they praise you one day and revile you the next—something that would never happen in the case of God's judgement of us. So let us not make fools of ourselves, or deceive ourselves all to no purpose. I mean, if we do something good, but do not strive for it with a view simply to fulfilling the command of our Lord and becoming a familiar of his alone, we go to trouble for nothing and deprive ourselves of the fruit of the action. You see, the person who does some good deed or other with a view to gaining credit from human beings, whether or not he succeeds in enjoying it—motivation of this kind after all, failing to gain its object: whether he succeeds or falls short, he has got in this life all the reward he is going to get, and will receive nothing in the next life (53d) by way of recompense. Why? Because he forfeited the possibility of enjoying the esteem of the judge by preferring the present to the future and the esteem of human beings to the favor of the just judge. If, on the contrary, we perform some spiritual action for the sole purpose of pleasing his unsleeping eye alone before whom everything lies open and bare, the reward will be kept for us unharmed, the contents of our prize will be intact, looking forward to it will do us good and bring us great consolation in advance, the prize will be protected for us in an unassailable treasury, and eventually even the esteem of human beings will come our way. You see, this esteem is something we enjoy in great abundance when we scorn it, when we do not seek it, when we do not chase after it.

(17) Why are you surprised if this happens in the case of those pursuing spiritual philosophy, (54a) when in many cases even men of the world have particular contempt and scorn for

14. Lk 18.9-14.

those bent on seeking people's good opinion? You will find such people jeered on all sides for their attachment to empty praise. So what could be more wretched than ourselves, with our interest in spiritual things, if we, like them, are inclined to sigh for people's good opinion instead of being content with praise from God? As Paul says, "His praise comes not from people but from God."¹⁵ Aren't you aware, dearly beloved, how at the races the horsemen are not diverted by the crowds present there, or the countless cries of encouragement, nor do they get satisfaction from the popular acclaim? Instead, they have eyes only for one person, the emperor, seated in the center, and, (54b) in expectation of his favor, they scorn the whole crowd, taking compliments to heart only when the emperor has awarded them the prize. In imitation of them, place no great store by people's regard, and don't let that motivate you to virtue; rather, await the verdict of the just Judge and look for his nod. In this way dispose your whole life so that in this world you may be constantly buoyed up by sound hopes and in the next may enjoy everlasting blessings. May this be the good fortune of us all, through the grace and loving kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, power and honor, now and forever, for all ages of ages. Amen. (54c)

15. Rom 2.29.

HOMILY 6

*"God said: 'Let lights be made in the firmament of heaven for lighting up the earth, to separate day from night; let them act as signs and indicate days, seasons and years.'"*¹



I WANT TO TAKE up the usual line of teaching, yet I hesitate and hang back: a cloud of despair has settled upon me, and has confused and upset my train of thought—not simply despair but anger as well. I'm not sure what I should do; uncertainty is paralyzing my brain. I mean, when I consider that at the merest suggestion from the devil you have put out of your mind all that unremitting teaching of ours and the daily exhortations, and have all rushed off to that diabolical concourse and been absorbed in horse racing, what sort of zest can I bring to the task of teaching you any more, when my former words have so lightly slipped away? (54d) What especially aggravates my despair and brings my anger to boiling point is the fact that despite all our exhortation you have put out of your mind the respect due to the holy season of Lent and have thus cast yourself into the devil's net. How could anyone, even with heart of stone, take that kind of rejection unmoved? I'm ashamed of you, believe me, I'm mortified to see the pointlessness of the trouble I've gone to, sowing seed among stones.

(2) Still, whether you heed my words or reject them, the reward coming to me will be unimpaired. After all, I did every-

1. Gn 1.14. Chrysostom's pastoral concern for his congregation, leading him generally to adopt a moral style of commentary (cf. Introduction 13, 16, 17), causes him in this 'homily' to depart from his text to berate his congregation for their attendance at horse racing—an amusement that was not altogether innocent in the Antioch of those days. See R. Hill, "On giving up the horses for Lent," *CleR* 68 (March 1983) 105–106.

thing in my power: I went to some expense, I gave the proper warning; my concern now, which is exercising me somewhat, is that through these efforts I may be the cause of your being held to account more severely. Scripture says: "That servant who knew the will of his master and did not discharge it will be severely punished."² None of you, in other words, can make a plea of ignorance, with us day by day sounding off about the same things and showing up the devil's snares (55a) for what they are, as well as the great ease of virtuous living for any of us wanting to stay on the alert. Don't you know that people so unconcerned about their own salvation and vacillating between attention to it and headlong course into the devil's net are compared in Sacred Scripture to dogs? It says, remember, "The person who turns away from his sin and then goes back to it is like a dog returning to its vomit."³ Do you see what it is they resemble who run off to that unlawful spectacle? Haven't you heard Christ's words: "Everyone who hears these words of mine and doesn't act on them can be compared to a fool who built his house on sandy ground: rivers came and winds blew; they struck that house, it collapsed, and its collapse was terrible."⁴ Those who have run off to the races (55b) have turned out worse than that. You see, that fellow's house suffered a collapse only under pressure; that is to say, Scripture made mention of rivers and winds to indicate to us, not the volume of water and the force of wind, but the severe onset of temptations; and its mention of the collapse of the house was not for us to think about a house that you can see. The story is really about the soul, which collapses under the pressure of anxiety it cannot sustain: in your case no gale blew nor rivers surged—simply a gentle breath from the devil came your way and overwhelmed you completely.

(3) What could be worse than this madness? What's the good of fasting, tell me? what's the use of coming along here? Who could fail to upbraid you and commiserate with us? To

2. Lk 12.47 somewhat abbreviated.

3. Cf. Prov 26.11.

4. Mt 7.26–27.

upbraid you, because everything you have amassed (55c) you've squandered in one fell swoop, opening the doors of your mind to the wicked demon to let him in and carry off all your spiritual wealth with the greatest of ease. Likewise to commiserate with us, because in this case we have been sounding off to heedless ears and wasting so much effort, sowing the seed day after day without possibility of getting any crop. After all, surely our purpose in putting effort into our sermons hasn't been simply to charm your ears or because we were interested in winning your praise? Unless you stood to gain something from the things we said, we would have done better in the long run to have said nothing. I mean, I have no wish to be the agent of your greater condemnation.

(4) A comparison can in fact be made with a merchant who assembles all his merchandise and fills his vessel with all his wealth, only to have a storm buffet it and through the force of the winds (55d) the ship sink with all hands, turning him into a piteous spectacle for all to see, appearing suddenly devoid of everything, reduced to utter indigence after all his incredible wealth—that is exactly the treatment the devil has meted out to you. I mean, finding your spiritual ship full of great wealth, and seeing your incredible treasure which you have been able to amass both from fasting and from the constant teaching, he exposed you to that useless and harmful horse race as though to a storm, and by means of that left you empty and bare of all your resources.

(5) I am aware that my rebuke is forthright; I beg your pardon for that—it is an index of the grief in my soul. These words of mine come not from hostility but from concern and heartfelt affection. So I am restraining my vehemence somewhat, having checked the spread of the cancer; (56a) my wish now, dear people, is to encourage sound hopes, lest you despair and give up the struggle. You see, in the case of the soul things don't happen in the way they do with the goods of the senses; I mean, in the latter instance it is impossible to restore the fortunes overnight of a person reduced to indigence from all that wealth, whereas in our case through God's loving kindness we can quickly return to our former prosperity, provided

only we are prepared to condemn what we have done in the past and here and now bridle our sloth. This, after all, is the kind of Lord we have, so liberal and generous; he shouts it out to us through the biblical author when he says, "I have no wish for the death of the sinner—only that he be converted and live."⁵

(6) I know that, being right-minded people, you recognize your faults. It is no small step on the way back to virtue to know the magnitude of your sins. (56b) By contrast, let no one insinuate once again that diabolical deceit in words like, "What's wrong, after all, with watching horses race?" Because, if you are really prepared to honestly study all that goes on there, you will find everything shot through with a satanic inspiration. I mean, it's not simply a matter of watching horses race, but listening to shouting and swearing and all sorts of improper speech, and watching whores parading around in the open and young fellows behaving in women's ways. Do these things strike you as having little influence for ensnaring your soul? After all, if even unforeseen circumstances make us lose our step and fall, and cast us into the very depths of disaster when we're not on the lookout, what is likely to happen to people who attend those places of set purpose, feasting their eyes on those forbidden sights and coming away utterly debauched? (56c) Our loving Lord, remember, who knows the threat to our nature and the devil's cunning and manifold wiles, has protected us from everything besetting us and wants to make us proof against the devil's snares; hence he has imposed this law in the words, "The man who looks on a woman with a view to lusting after her has already committed adultery in his heart,"⁶ calling the gaze directed with curiosity consummated adultery.

(7) So don't say further to me: "What harm, after all, comes from passing the time there?" Because that single factor of a horse race is sufficient to cause the ruin of your soul. You see, whenever we waste precious time on worthless things, which, far from contributing anything to our soul, even harm it, and

5. Ez 18.23.

6. Mt 5.28.

when we squabble and pour out a flood of words good and bad, what excuse do we have? what account can we give? To draw a comparison: here in church if we tend to protract the instruction, (56d) many people become restive and impatient, and allege bodily distress and weariness, although this wonderful ceiling is sufficient to distract them from that;⁷ there are no grounds for complaint in cold, or rain, or force of winds. There, on the contrary, where they are scourged by heavy rain and fierce wind storms, or at other times the sun sheds its burning rays, they are prepared to spend not an hour or two but most of the day; the aged have no respect for their own grey hair, while the young are not ashamed to patronize the haunts of the old; so great, however, is their self-deception that it is with relish that they embrace that bane of their soul, and no thought is given to the brevity and impermanence of the harmful pleasure, the eternity of the pain, and the accusation of conscience.

(8) Even now I see the countenances of some people, and I am wondering about their state of soul and how far repentance has touched them by now. But in case you lapse into the same fault again, (57a) and, despite all our exhortation, run back to those satanic gatherings, I must make my formal denunciation. You see, it is not always proper to apply mild remedies: instead, when the cancer responds slowly, one must apply those that are sharp and likely to sting, so that the cure may be faster. Accordingly, let all those open to these accusations learn that if they persist in their lax ways despite this further exhortation of ours, we will not keep patience; instead, we will invoke the laws of the Church and bring great vehemence to our teaching lest they stray in that direction again and give such a contemptuous hearing to the divine sayings. I'm not saying this in regard to everyone gathered here, but to

7. Certainly Chrysostom's homilies are quite long, and tend to get longer, so that he frequently alludes to the tedium experienced by his listeners and apologizes for their protracted length; he also refers disparagingly to the congregation's distraction—by the ceiling, in this case, and in a more celebrated instance (Sermon 4 on *Genesis*) by the lamplighter, who becomes an occasion for a beautiful parallel to the scriptural homilist (Introduction 12).

those guilty of the behavior I've mentioned. While our sermon reaches everybody without exception, if the cap fits wear it, and apply the appropriate remedy. Let guilty persons put away their sloth forthwith and proceed no further, (57b) but rather shake themselves up with utter earnestness and set about the correction of their faults. For their part, let the innocent listeners take more care against deception in case they ever become guilty.⁸

(9) However, dear people, to convince you that we have been led to say this out of a heartfelt grief arising from affection and concern and through grave fear for your salvation—come now, let us once more nourish ourselves on sound hopes by proposing to you the customary instruction, so as to demonstrate to you the fatherly regard we have for you. For your part, I beg you, attend to what is said with close attention so as to gain further good and thus return home. I feel the need, dear people, to repeat these words we have read before: “God said, ‘Let lights be created in the firmament of heaven for lighting up the earth, (57c) so as to separate day from night; let them act as signs and indicate days, seasons and years. Let them provide light in the firmament of heaven, to shine upon the earth.’ This is what happened.” You see, since the blessed Moses taught us yesterday how the Creator of all beautified the shapelessness of the earth with vegetation, the variety of flowers and the growth of crops, today he switches his description to the arrangement of heaven. In other words, just as the earth was beautified by the things produced from it, in like manner he caused heaven, which was already visible, to be more conspicuous and bright by lending it the variety that comes from a range of stars and from the creation of the two huge lights, namely, the sun and the moon. “God made,” the text goes on, “the two huge lights, the greater light for governing the day, and the lesser light for governing the night and the stars.”⁹

8. Nowhere does Chrysostom become more labored in his admonition than here; so the ‘sport of kings’, especially in Lent, ranked high in his scale of misdemeanors.

9. Gn 1.16.

(10) Do you see the wisdom (57d) of the Creator? He merely spoke, and this marvellous body came into being, namely, the sun. You see, it calls this light great and says it was brought into existence for governing the day. In other words, the sun renders the day brighter, shedding its rays like flashing lights and day by day revealing its own beauty in full bloom: as soon as it appears at dawn, it awakes the whole human race to the discharge of their respective duties. This beauty the blessed author reveals when he says: "The sun beams, like a bridegroom emerging from his chamber, like a giant in the running of his course; its span extends from one corner of heaven right to the other corner of heaven."¹⁰ Do you see how he revealed to us both the sun's beauty and its speed of movement? That is, in saying, "Its span extends from one corner of heaven (58a) right to the other corner of heaven," it indicated to us how in one moment of time it traverses the whole world and scatters its rays from end to end, making its great resources available: it not only supplies heat to the earth but also dries it up, and not only dries it up but enkindles it, and supplies us with many different resources, so marvellous a body is it, quite beyond one's power to describe adequately.

(11) I mention this to you and sing the praises of this heavenly body so that you may not stop short there, dearly beloved, but proceed further and transfer your admiration to the creator of the heavenly body. After all, the greater the sun is shown to be, so much the more marvellous is the revelation of the Creator.

(12) Pagan peoples, however, in their wonder and stupor at this heavenly body were unable to look beyond it to praise its creator; instead, they sang its praises (58b) and treated it as a deity. Hence the reason for the blessed Paul's saying, "They worshipped and served the creature instead of its creator."¹¹ What could be more stupid than people failing to recognize the creator from the creature and being caught up in such error as to put creature and artefact on the same level as their creator? So then, foreseeing the inclination of slothful people

10. Ps 19.5-6.

11. Rom 1.25.

to error, Sacred Scripture teaches us that the creation of this heavenly body took place three days later, after the growth of all the plants from the earth, after the earth's taking its own form, so that afterwards no one could say that without this force these things would not have been brought forth from the earth. Hence it shows you everything completed before the creation of this body lest you attribute the production of the crops to it instead of to the Creator of all things, the one who said from the beginning, (58c) "Let the earth bring forth a crop of vegetation."

(13) But if they were to say that the sun's virtue also contributes to the ripening of the crops, I would not gainsay them. After all, it's similar to the case of the farmer: in saying he contributes to the processes of the soil, I don't ascribe everything to him: even if thousands of farmers did their best, their efforts would be fruitless unless the One initiating the process through his own design from the beginning willed to put in train the very creation of the crops. In exactly the same way, I say, even if after the farmer's work there is assistance from the work of the sun, and the moon and the mildness of the climate, this would likewise be to no effect unless the hand from above did not play its part; once, however, this mighty hand is ready, the work of the elements makes its most efficacious contribution.

(14) Give close attention to this so as to bridle those still intent on deceiving themselves, and have nothing to do with assigning to creatures the honor due to the Creator. (58d) Accordingly, Sacred Scripture not only shows us the sun's beauty, and immensity and usefulness in the words, "It beams like a bridegroom, like a giant in running its course," but also its limitations and powerlessness: listen to what it says elsewhere, "What could provide more light than the sun? Yet even it fails."¹² Don't be deceived by appearances, it tells us: unless the Creator willed so to direct, it would disappear as though it had never existed. If pagan peoples had understood this, they

12. Sir 17:31.

would not have fallen victim to such deception, but would properly have seen that from contemplation of created things one should move on to the Creator. Accordingly, he created it on the fourth day lest you think it is the cause of the day. In other words, what we said about the plants we will say also about the day, namely, that three days occurred before the creation of the sun. The Lord wanted to make daylight more brilliant by means of this heavenly body also—(59a) something we would say is true in the case of the lesser light as well, by which I mean the moon; after all, three nights occurred before its creation. Still, once created, the moon makes its own contribution, banishing the gloom of the night and accomplishing (you could almost say) the same things the sun does in other respects.

(15) I mean, the sun was designed “for governing the day,” the moon “for governing the night.” What is meant by “for governing the day” and “for governing the night”? The text implies the sun took control of the day and the moon of the night, so that the sun should render the day brighter with its rays, and the moon should dissipate the gloom and with its light provide the human race with the possibility of discharging their duties. I mean, by this arrangement the traveller travels the path in confidence, the sailor steers the boat and navigates the seas, and everyone conducting personal affairs can without any concern follow the dictates of individual intuition.

(16) Then, after teaching us (59b) the usefulness of these lights, the text goes on: “And the stars: God placed them in the firmament of heaven to shine on the earth for governing the day and the night and to separate the light from the darkness.”¹³ Notice how he made clear to us their usefulness also: “He placed them in the firmament of heaven,” it says. What is the meaning of, “He placed”? As though to say “He fixed”? By no means; after all, we often see them traverse a mighty span in the twinkling of an eye, never standing still in one

13. Gn 1.17–18.

place but following their own course which they have been directed to run by the Lord. So what does "He placed" mean? It is equivalent to saying he directed them to be in heaven. You can, in fact, see Scripture leading up to this when it says elsewhere, "He placed Adam in paradise,"¹⁴ not because he had fixed him in paradise (59c) but because he directed him to be in paradise. By the same token, about the stars we would say that he directed them to be in the firmament of heaven and shed their light on the earth. I mean, dearly beloved, consider this: would it not be more pleasing to see heaven studded with stars at midnight than any number of fields and gardens, the sky adorned with a range of stars as though with flowers, and the stars themselves shedding light on the earth? This, after all, is what they were designed for, shining on the earth and governing the day and the night, which is generally true of the great lights also. Remember, when it taught us the creation of the two lights and the stars, it used these words in common about them all: "For governing the day and the night, and separating the light from the darkness." You see, just as you can't spy the stars moving in the sky during the day (59d) (the sun, of course, concealing their strength with its great brilliance), so too during the night the sun would never be visible, since the moon is sufficient with its light to dispel the gloom of night; each of the heavenly bodies keeps to its own boundaries and never oversteps its due measure, but rather maintains the Lord's design and fulfils its proper purpose.

(17) Who could tell all the other advantages conferred on the human race through the usefulness of these lights and the stars? The text says, remember, "'Let them act as signs, and indicate days, seasons and years.'" What is meant by 'act as signs, and indicate days, seasons and years'? Sacred Scripture wants to teach us that the movement of these bodies conveys to us the knowledge of times, the changing of solstices, the number of the days, and the course of the year, and from these facts we can fathom (60a) everything. The navigator, for

14. A paraphrase of Gn 2.8.

example, with his eyes on the path of these bodies, gazing intently at the sky and studying all these signs carefully, is thus able to hold his course and cross the sea; though the night is often black, he can steer by the sight of the stars, and through his own skill bring safety to his company. The farmer, too, knows how to learn from these signs when he must sow the seed, till the soil, do the ploughing, and when sharpen the sickle and set about harvesting the crops. Not a few aids for our daily living are contributed to us by the knowledge of times, the number of the days, and the cycle of the year; (60b) and you would find many advantages for human existence stemming from these created things, which it would be impossible to enumerate fully in a precise manner. Hence the need to learn from these few details how to estimate the usefulness of the heavenly bodies, to marvel at their creation and adore and praise their Creator, to be aghast at his ineffable love shown to human beings; for humanity alone and for no other reason did he create everything, intending a little later to place them like some king or ruler over other things created by him.

(18) The text goes on: "God saw that it was good." Do you see how each day Sacred Scripture shows him satisfied with his creatures so as to undercut a pretext of people daring to find fault with the things created by him? (60c) I mean, for the reason that Sacred Scripture with this purpose in mind registers the same point in every case, it becomes clear by dint of repetition. After all, it would have been enough following all the acts of creation to say once that everything he had made was very good; but knowing the extent of the limitations of our reasoning, he repeats the process each time, to teach us that everything was created with a certain inventive wisdom and ineffable love.¹⁵

15. Again Chrysostom's theology of the Word leads him to relate the *precision* of the text (in this case, repetition of detail) to human *limitations*, taken account of in divine *considerateness*, itself a mark of *love*. It is a beautiful synthesis, underlying Chrysostom's whole approach to Scripture. See R. Hill, "On looking again at *synkatabasis*," *Prudentia* 13 (1981) 3-11.

(19) "Evening came," the text goes on, "and morning came: a fourth day."¹⁶ In other words, when he had completed the arrangement of heaven, beautifying it with the stars and creating those two great lights, he brought the day to a close: "Evening came, and morning: a fourth day," says Scripture. Notice how it speaks in this way in the case of each day, wanting to rivet the sacred truths in our mind by the repetition in the teaching.

(20) Accordingly, let us carve these truths (60d) across our heart and hold fast to them, let us shake off all sloth, let us cling carefully to these salutary truths and with all forbearance instruct people ensnared in pagan error not to confuse this order by deserting the Creator to worship the creatures that have been created for our welfare and utility. I mean, even if pagans shout and scream a thousand times, I will proclaim it from the housetops that all these things were created for the human race, since the Creator is sufficient of himself and needed none of them; instead, it was to show his love for us that he created them all, demonstrating the great regard he has for the human race, and it was for us to move from these creatures to bring to him a proper adoration.

(21) After all, how great would be the folly of stumbling over the beauty of these creatures and (61a) remaining at their level, instead of raising the eyes of our minds to their Creator and believing the words of blessed Paul: "From the creation of the world what is invisible to our eyes in God has through created things become perceptible to our understanding."¹⁷ What do you mean, O human being? Do you see the sky and marvel at its beauty, at the variety of the stars, at their utter brilliance? Don't stop there, but lead your mind on to their Creator. Again, the sun's light astonishes you, and the sight of the great usefulness it has stirs you to amazement, and when you see its rays shining on your eyes, you marvel at the beauty of this heavenly body. But don't stop there, either: consider instead that if the creature is so wonderful and incredible, surpassing all human understanding, what on earth

16. Gn 1.19.

17. Rom 1.20.

can he be like who creates this merely by a word of command? (61b) Consider the very same in the case of the earth too: when you see the earth adorned with flowers like some multi-colored garment, the foliage of plants enveloping it all over, don't think this is due spontaneously to the earth's power, or to the energy of the sun, or the moon; realize instead, as wisdom suggests, that for the creation of these things he simply spoke the word, "Let the earth put forth a crop of vegetation," and forthwith the whole face of the earth was brilliant color.

(22) If we daily turn these thoughts over in our minds, we will both be right-minded ourselves and also refer to the Lord the praise that is (if not adequate) at least all our abilities can manage. Let us praise him not simply for that reason, but also by means of a life lived in the best way possible—by resisting the temptation to relapse into past sins, by bidding (61c) farewell to those diabolical errors, by learning from the past and showing great zeal, and thus by earnest confession winning favor from above. You see, in his great love for us he finds it sufficient that we desist from evil; if we make this decision, we will readily come to the practice of good deeds. Let me no longer catch sight of any of you attending race courses, I beg you, nor spending the best part of the day in unsavory gatherings; and don't give your time to dice throwing and the shouting generated by it and the ensuing brawls. I mean, what's the good of fasting if, on the one hand, you pass the day without food and, on the other, you abandon yourself to the dice and to brainless nonsense, and often waste the whole day in swearing and blaspheming? Don't, I beg you, let us be so slothful as to neglect our salvation; instead, let our conversation be constantly on spiritual topics; (61d) a divine book in our hands, let each of us invite our neighbors to join us and refresh our minds and theirs with the divine words,¹⁸ so that in this way we

18. We noted above (Homily 2, note 13) the roots in Chrysostom's theology of Vatican II's notion of the domestic Church; that Council's teaching on the extent of inspiration, whereby the reader enjoys the same Spirit as the scriptural composer (*Dei Verbum* 12), is suggested here in Chrysostom's recommendation of home Bible groups, as elsewhere in the homilies. (Cf. Introduction 11)

may be able to escape the snares of the evil one, reap great benefits from our fasting, and enjoy the love of God, the grace and mercy of his only-begotten Son, to whom with the Father and the Spirit be glory, power and honor, now and forever, for ages of ages. Amen.

HOMILY 7

"God said: 'Let the waters produce reptiles with living souls, and on the earth winged creatures flying across the firmament of heaven.' This is what happened. God made the huge sea monsters, and every single living reptile of various kinds produced by the waters."¹



ESTERDAY WE sufficiently upbraided those who deserted us for the horse racing. We showed them how great was the harm they suffered, and how in one fell swoop they had squandered the spiritual riches accruing to them from fasting, and (62a) how from great wealth they had at one stroke cast themselves into utter indigence. Come now, then, today let us make use of a milder remedy, and bind up the wounds of their souls just as if they were our own limbs, because even yesterday when we applied harsher remedies, it was not simply to cause them pain and aggravate their suffering, but rather that we might be able to reach the cancer by drastic measures. After all, this is what is done by doctors and parents: the former initially apply the more potent medications, and when they break open the ulcer, then they call into play remedies more likely to relieve the pain; and when parents see their children kicking over the traces, they first administer rebuke of a severer type, and afterwards admonition and encouragement. We too will follow the same procedure: if yesterday we used our words with severity, (62b) today on the contrary we will phrase our speech in a milder fashion, and show the same care as for our own limbs. You see, your progress encourages in us greater confidence, and this is a source of spiritual riches for us—to see you devoting yourselves to spiritual interests, being distinguished for virtue and

1. Gn 1.20–21.

shunning risk of harm. So by the same token, when we see you stumbling and ensnared in the deceits of the devil, we are filled with disappointment, and a certain shame, so to say, spreads over our soul. The blessed Paul says, remember, "This is what keeps us alive, to see you standing firm in the Lord."²

(2) So as mature people filled with understanding, forget what lies behind and press on to what is ahead; renew the covenant you have made with Christ, (62c) keep it firm for the future, and with sober reasoning shut off every entrance to the devil's wiles. Use every endeavor at this late stage to expunge the stigma of sloth attached to you, affected as you are by this demeaning and harmful habit; ponder the fact that not only is this habit bad enough in bringing great harm to those who attend those places, but they become cause of scandal to many others. I mean, when pagans and Jews see the person who daily frequents the church and is a beneficiary of constant teaching all of a sudden turning up there, how can they fail to conclude that what we do is a fraud, and entertain the same suspicion about everything to do with us? Don't you hear the blessed Paul counselling us in strident tones and urging us, "Give no scandal"³? (62d) Then, lest you think his warning is given only in regard to his own community, he continued, "to either Jews or Gentiles," and then added, "or to the Church of God." You see, nothing so harms and damages our religion as much as scandal given to unbelievers. So when they see amongst us people who are conspicuous for virtue and who display a disregard for things of this life, some of them are enraged by it but others are often overwhelmed with wonder at the fact that, while having the same human nature as theirs, they do not share the same values. Of course, when they see someone affected by a slight degree of indifference, at once they turn their tongue against us all without exception, and from one person's indifference condemn the whole community of Christians alike. Nor do they stop there: at once they direct their words against the head of the community, because of the negligence of the members, (63a) and do

2. 1 Thes 3.8.

3. 1 Cor 10.32.

not refrain from blaspheming against the Lord of them all. They think the indifference of these Christians masks the very errors to which they themselves are subject.

(3) For proof that this brings greatest risk to those who provide others with an occasion of blasphemy, let us listen to the prophet's cry when he speaks as God's mouthpiece: "Alas for you: it is your fault that my name is blasphemed amongst the Gentiles."⁴ That's a fearful statement, fraught with terror. That is to say, "Alas" is like the cry of someone lamenting the fate of people heading for that inescapable punishment. In other words, just as this kind of retribution awaits those who through their own indifference bear the responsibility for blasphemy, likewise, on the other hand, there are grounds for awarding a thousand laurels to those who show a care for virtue. This is the very lesson Christ gave us in saying, "Let your light shine in people's presence so that they may see your good works (63b) and praise your Father in heaven."⁵ That is, just as people are scandalized by the indifference of some of us and direct the edge of their tongue against our Lord, so [Christ is saying] when you practice virtue and people see you, they do not stop at praise of you; instead, when they see your good deeds shining and lighting up your face, they are moved to praise of your Father in heaven. When this happens in their case, we in our turn are amply rewarded, and over and above their praise the Lord bestows on us countless good things: "Those giving glory to me I myself will glorify,"⁶ he says.

(4) Accordingly, dearly beloved, let us do everything for the purpose of giving glory to our Lord, and let us not be an occasion of scandal to anybody. This, after all, is the unfailing lesson given us by the whole world's teacher, blessed Paul, (63c) as for example when he says, "If food is a source of scandal to my brother, let me never till the end of time touch meat again;" and again, "By sinning against your brothers in this way through bruising your tender conscience, you sin against Christ."⁷ A stern admonition that, entailing a heavy condem-

4. Is 52.5.

5. Mt 5.16.

6. 1 Sm 2.30.

7. 1 Cor 8.12-13, with the order reversed.

nation. In other words, he is saying, don't think the harm will be inflicted solely on one person: it passes on to Christ himself, who for that person was crucified. So if the Lord was not swayed from being crucified for him, would you not make every effort to avoid giving him any occasion for scandal? You will find Paul giving this advice everywhere to his disciples; it is, after all, the factor that keeps our life together. Hence he uses these words in writing in another letter: "Let each of you consider not your own concerns but the concerns of others;"⁸ and again in another place: (63d) "Everything is lawful for me, but not everything edifies others."⁹ Do you see the apostolic attitude? Even if it is lawful for me to behave in a certain way, he is saying, without fear of repercussion for myself on that account, yet to avoid interfering with my neighbor's spiritual progress I would not presume to behave like that. Do you see the soul full of loving concern—how he has no eye at all for his own interests, but shows us in every way that the greatest virtue consists in taking great care for our neighbor's spiritual progress.

(5) Recognizing all this, let us be on our guard, I beg you, and steer clear of the things able to undermine the wealth of our virtue, and let us do nothing likely to bring harm to our neighbor. This, after all, adds a further dimension to our sin, and brings upon us severer punishment. Let us not look down on an ordinary person and utter those chilling words, "What concern is it of mine if such a person is scandalized?" What are you saying, tell (64a) me? What concern is it of yours? Christ charged you to so let your light shine that not only would you excite the wonder of the onlookers, but your Lord would be praised—whereas you regard it of no account to be doing the opposite and being responsible for blasphemy instead of praise directed to him? Where in this attitude is there a trace of a circumspect soul carefully respecting the laws of God?

(6) If, however, there is someone who used to speak in quite the same manner as that under the influence of habit, now, I

8. Phil 2.4.

9. 1 Cor 10.23.

beg you, let him accept this advice and desist from those improper remarks; let him show such zeal in all his actions as never to fall under the condemnation of that unsleeping eye, nor be reproached by his own conscience, nor provoke the blasphemy of the Lord from those who observe him. (64b) You see, if we manage our affairs with such caution, we shall enjoy great love on the Lord's part and dispel as well the wiles of the devil. After all, when he sees us living soberly and watchfully, the devil will think he is facing a useless task and will take himself from our sight.

(7) But so much by way of introduction.¹⁰ Come now, let us spread a spiritual table before you by laying out before you, dear people, what has been read, and let us see if we can learn what it is today, too, the blessed Moses wants to teach us—or rather the Holy Spirit through his tongue. So what does the text say? “God said, ‘Let the waters produce reptiles with living souls, and on the earth winged creatures flying across the firmament of heaven.’ This is what happened.” See the Lord's loving kindness, how by a certain order and sequence he teaches us about every created thing. (64c) First he taught us how at his command he awakened the earth to produce fruits; then he taught us about the creation of the two lights; he added also the range of stars, through which the beauty of heaven was made more brilliant.

(8) Today finally he switches to the waters and shows us from them living beings coming at his word and command. The text says, remember, “Let the waters produce reptiles with living souls, and on the earth winged creatures flying across the firmament of heaven.” What words, tell us, can do justice to that marvel? What tongue can measure up to the praise of the Creator? He simply said, “Let the earth put forth,” and immediately he awakened it to birth pangs; now he says, “Let the waters produce.” See how his directions correspond: in one case, the text says, “Let it put forth,” in

10. By this stage Chrysostom's congregation would have been wondering if they were going to be given a commentary on the Gn verses read at the outset—such was the length to which Chrysostom's introduction extended. Cf. Introduction 11.

this case, "Let the waters produce reptiles with living souls," (64d) You see, just as in the case of the earth he simply said, "Let it put forth," and there appeared a wide-ranging variety of flowers and plants and seeds, all created by one word, so too in this case he said, "Let the waters produce reptiles with living souls," and there were created on the earth winged creatures flying across the firmament of heaven (and all of a sudden such kinds of reptiles and such variety of birds as to beggar counting.)

(9) While it was one word, and a short one, the kinds of living things were many and varied. But don't be astonished, dearly beloved; after all, it was God's word, and his word endowed those creatures with life. Do you see how he brings everything from non-being to being? Did you see the precision of the teaching? Did you see the considerateness of the Lord, and how far he demonstrates it in regard to our human race? I mean, how would we have been able to know these things precisely had not he in his really unspeakable love deemed it proper (65a) to teach humanity through the tongue of the biblical author, so that we might know the order of created things and the power of the Creator, and how his word took effect, and his utterance endowed creatures with life and the way to existence?

(10) Yet there are some stupid people who, despite this kind of teaching, are rash enough to withhold belief, and do not admit that these visible things have a creator. Some of them hold they came into existence by themselves, others that they were formed from some underlying matter. See the extent of the devil's wiles, how he exploits the facile thinking of people in the thrall of error. For that reason the blessed Moses, inspired by the divine Spirit, teaches us with great precision, lest we fall victim to the same things as they, instead of being able to know clearly (65b) both the sequence of created things and how each thing was created. You see, if God in his care for our salvation¹¹ had not directed the tongue of the biblical author

11. This passage is another conspicuous instance of the synthesis of Chrysostom's basic principles on Scripture—inspiration, love, considerateness, precision—and all "for our salvation," as he repeats over and over again.

in this way, it would have been sufficient to say that God made heaven and earth, the sea and living things, and not add the order of the days, nor what was created first and what later. But, lest he leave any grounds for excuse to those bent on folly, he explains in this way both the order of created things and the number of the days, and he teaches us everything with great considerateness so that we may learn the whole truth and not turn our minds to the error of those uttering all these ideas from their own reasoning. But we are able to know the ineffable power of our creator.

(11) "This is what happened," the text says. He said: "Let the waters produce reptiles with living souls, (65c) and on the earth winged creatures flying across the firmament of heaven," and the elements obeyed, and carried out what was commanded. "It happened," the text goes on, "just as the Lord commanded. God made the huge sea monsters and every single living reptile which the waters produced in a range of kinds, and every winged creature according to kind. God saw that they were good, and God blessed them in these words: 'Increase and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.'" ¹² Notice here again, I ask you, the extent of the Spirit's wisdom. I mean, the blessed Moses, after saying, "This is what happened," teaches us by adding one detail at a time in the words, "God made the huge sea monsters, and every single living reptile which the waters produced in a range of kinds, and every winged creature according to kind. God saw that they were good." (65d) Here once more he takes the ground from under those rash enough to speak always heedlessly. That is, lest anyone be able to say, Why did he make the sea monsters? What good are they to us? What is the advantage of their creation? Of set purpose he first said, "God made the huge sea monsters, and every single living reptile, and the birds," and immediately added, "God saw that they were good." In other words, he is saying, although you stand in ignorance of the reason for the created things, don't presume to find fault with their creation. Having

12. Gn 1.20-22.

heard the Lord give his approval and declare them good, how can you be so demented as to dare to ask, Why were they made? Are you scorning their creation as pointless? I mean, if you were well disposed you would be able from the creation of these things to get an insight into the power of your Lord and his ineffable love—his power, for the reason that he caused living beings like this to be created from the waters by his word and command, and his love, for the reason that in creating them he gave each of them a particular place, and (66a) assigned them a boundless area of the sea so that they might not hinder one another but dwell in the waters and provide an example to teach us the Creator's extraordinary power and cause no harm to the human race.

(12) Do you think that it is an insignificant mark of love that a twofold benefit comes to you from these creatures? They do, after all, lead those of us willing to think aright, to the knowledge of God and cause us to be amazed at the greatness of his loving kindness in freeing the human race from the harm brought on itself. You see, it was not simply for our use that everything was created by him, but on account of his great prodigality: while some things were created for our use, others had this purpose—that the power of their Creator might be proclaimed. (66b) So, when you hear that “God saw that it was good,” presume no longer to contradict Sacred Scripture, nor bury your head in idle speculation with questions why this or that was made. “God blessed them,” the text says, “and said, ‘Increase and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let the birds multiply on the earth.’” This is the blessing, that they should grow to a great number. You see, since the creatures he made had life in them, he wanted their life to be lasting. Hence the text added: “God blessed them and said, ‘Increase and multiply.’” That word, you know, influences them right up to the present, and has spanned such an extent of time (66c) without one of those species being diminished.¹³ After all, God's blessing and the form of

13. It is not surprising, all things considered, if Chrysostom strikes us at times in his commentary as uncritical, even fundamentalist. We have, how-

words, "Increase and multiply," bestowed on them life and permanence.

(13) "Evening came and morning came: a fifth day."¹⁴ Do you see how Sacred Scripture taught us also the living things created on the fifth day? Well, just wait a while and you will see once again the loving kindness of your Lord. I mean, he not merely quickened the waters to birth of living things, but also directed land creatures in their turn to be produced from the earth. In other words, today it is hardly inappropriate to arrive at the things made on the sixth day as well. The text says: "God said: 'Let the earth bring forth living things in their various kinds, four-footed creatures, reptiles, wild beasts on the earth, (66d) cattle and all the reptiles of the earth in their various kinds.'"¹⁵ And it was so done. See the earth also for a second time producing twofold fruit, and doing the Lord's bidding. On the first occasion, remember, it brought forth a crop of seeds, but on this occasion living beings, four-footed creatures, reptiles, wild beasts and cattle. Notice that this instance demonstrates what I told you in advance, that it wasn't simply for our use that he produced all these things; instead, it was also for our benefit¹⁶ in the sense that we might see the overflowing abundance of his creatures and be overwhelmed at the Creator's power, and be in a position to know that all these things were produced by a certain wisdom and ineffable love out of regard for the human being that was destined to come into being.

(14) (67a) "God made the wild beasts of the earth in their various kinds," the text says, "cattle in their various kinds, and all the reptiles in their various kinds. God saw that they were good."¹⁷ Where now are those people rash enough to ask,

ever, commented above on his tendency to rationalize when in doubt, and like preachers the world over he is not inclined to underplay a point.

14. Gn 1.23.

15. Gn 1.24. Chrysostom's text being lengthier than both LXX and Heb., themselves not in agreement.

16. The distinction being made here between "use" (*chreia*) and "benefit" (*opheleia*) seems delicate yet meaningful—despite editors' attempts to alter the text.

17. Gn 1.25.

What's the point of wild beasts? of reptiles? Let them listen to the words of Sacred Scripture: "God saw that they were good." Tell me, the Creator himself commends the created things, and do you dare to call them in question? Would this attitude stop short at any madness? Admittedly, in the case of the seeds and the plants the earth has produced not only fruitbearing trees but also those giving no fruit, and brings forth not only crops that are profitless but also some that are strange to us and ones that are in many cases harmful. But no one will presume to find fault with their creation on that account; after all, they have not been produced without rhyme or reason. I mean, they would not have received commendation from the Lord (67b) had they not been created to serve some need. So the comparison is clear: in the case of the trees not all are fruitbearing; many bear no fruit and yet even they provide no less a remarkable service to us and contribute to our well-being; we make our houses from them and gain many other advantages contributing to our well-being. So, by and large, there is nothing which has been created without some reason, even if human nature is incapable of knowing precisely the reason for them all.

(15) In like manner, therefore, as with the trees, so too with the wild beasts: some are useful for our food, others for serving us. The species of wild beasts and reptiles, too, are of no little help to us, and if somebody is prepared to study them in a right mind, he will find even now, when control over them has been wrested from us owing to the disobedience of the first human creature, (67c) that the benefit is great that comes to us from them. I mean, physicians get from them many things which they employ as medications capable of promoting the health of our bodies. Otherwise, what great harm would have come from the creation of the wild beasts at a time when they, like domestic animals, were intended to come under the control of the creature soon to be created. In fact, it is time I spoke about this.

(16) Now, with a view to your learning the surpassing love of the Lord of all displayed in regard to our human race, consider the way he stretched out heaven, unfolded the earth,

created the firmament like a dividing wall making a separation in the waters, then directed the joining of the waters to happen, called one part seas and the dry part earth, next he beautified the latter with the proliferation of seeds (67d) and later with crops. Further, he went on to the creation of the two great lights and the variety of stars through which he added to the beauty of heaven. Then he produced from the waters the living beings and on the earth winged creatures flying across the firmament of heaven; and after completing the number of five days, since it was necessary for living beings to be created from the earth, he directed these to be brought forth, some suitable for food, others useful for our service, as well as wild beasts and reptiles. Then finally, after arranging everything in order, by imposing an appropriate order and design on all visible things, preparing a lavish table filled with rich and varied viands, laden with wealth and abundance, and making what might be called kingdoms above (68a) and below, conspicuous from all points and gleaming with variety—then finally he creates the being meant to enjoy all these things, giving this creature power over all these visible things. And as a demonstration of the degree to which this creature about to be fashioned is more elevated than all the other creatures, he bids everything he has made come under this creature's authority and supervision.

(17) Lest, however, we draw out the sermon to a great length, let us be content with what we have said and postpone to the next occasion what has to do with the fashioning of this wonderful being graced with reason and spirit—I mean, the human being. Now we will address to you the customary exhortation¹⁸ so as to preserve the remembrance of the things said, and also, through all the things seen, to stir ourselves to praise of the Lord. The fact that we do not attain this, nor manage to grasp the meaning of created things, (68b) should not become for us grounds for unbelief but rather an occasion of praise. You see, when reasoning fails and the intellect

¹⁸ The style of the homily's conclusion is as perfunctory as its introduction—predictably so, quite obviously, for Chrysostom's congregation.

proves inadequate, call to your mind the greatness of the Lord, especially from the fact that his power is such that we fail to understand precisely the meaning of the things made by him. This is the attitude of sensible minds and sober hearts.

(18) When the pagans in this regard fell into error by entrusting everything to their own reasoning and refusing to acknowledge the limitations of their own nature, they let their imagination run riot, exceeded the measure of their own capabilities, and lost the sense of the status they could lay claim to. In other words, though they were elevated by the gift of reason and received such a pre-eminence from the Lord, out-ranking all other visible creatures in esteem, these people were cast into such stupidity as (68c) to worship dogs, monkeys, crocodiles and lowlier animals than these. Why mention brute beasts? Many of them fell into such folly and stupidity as to worship even onions and more worthless things than that. Hence the biblical author had these people in mind when he said: "He was likened to the brute beasts and resembled them."¹⁹ The one who was dignified with the gift of reason, it means, and endowed with such great wisdom has become like the brutes, and even worse. That is to say, those beasts, being without the gift of reason, are not liable to punishment, whereas the creature dignified with reason and yet taking on their condition of irrationality will properly incur heavy penalties for being ungrateful for such liberality. Following this extreme they went on to call sticks and stones gods, and divinized all the visible elements; once, you see, they strayed from the right path, (68d) they fell headlong and were cast into the very depths of wickedness.

(19) Let us, however, not give up hope of their salvation; on the contrary, let us bring to the fore what we have to offer and converse with them in a spirit of great zeal and long-suffering, showing them also the absurdity of their behavior and the enormity of its harmfulness. Let us never despair of their sal-

19. Ps 49.20 in the version of the LXX, different from and lengthier than the Heb.

vation. In fact, it is likely that with the passage of time they will be convinced, especially if we live in such a way as to offer them no scandal. I mean, when many of them see some of our associates, who bear the name of Christian and lay claim to it, playing the robber like themselves, being guilty of avarice and envy, plotting and scheming, committing all sorts of crimes, victims of luxury and gluttony, no longer do they heed the advice from our lips: they consider all we have to offer is deception, (69a) and that everyone is guilty of the same faults. So think carefully, I beg you, of the severity of the punishments such people have become liable to in not only heaping burning coals on their own heads but also being responsible for the fact that others are stuck fast in error and block their ears to instruction in virtue, as well as putting in the devil's way people in quest of virtue, and—what is worse than everything—being responsible for blasphemy against the Lord by these people. Do you see the extent of the harm caused by this evil? Do you see how people render themselves liable not to normal punishment but to extreme severity, especially as they are fated to bear the guilt of all, not only for their own damnation, but for the scandal caused to those in error, the condemnation of people bent on virtue, and the blasphemies directed against God?

(20) So then, let us keep all this in mind and not neglect (69b) our own salvation; let us give careful attention to living a life of God's wanting, in the knowledge that on the basis of this most of all will we be either condemned or judged worthy of loving kindness at his hands. Accordingly, let us so perform every action as to pass our lives with a good conscience and lead towards the truth by means of our godly life-style those people still in error. Then all the others associated with us may because of us enjoy a good name, our Lord may be glorified above all and may take closer care of us. You see, when, at the sight of us, people are edified and give praise to God, we enjoy greater favor in his sight. After all, what could be more blessed than the person who lives in such a fashion that all who witness it are amazed and declare, (69c) "Glory to you, O God! what marvellous people Christians are! what wonderful

philosophy they give evidence of! how low their esteem for the things of this world! how insubstantial all things are considered to be by them—like shadows and dreams—and how little attached they are to anything in this visible world, treating everything like people living in exile, longing each day for release from this world!" What great recompense do you think these words bring to people living in this fashion, even here and now from God? Actually, the really remarkable thing is that even those who have this opinion of us will desist from their error and come back to the truth. It is quite clear how much encouragement this provides for the kind of people in that situation.

(21) Accordingly, knowing as we do that we are responsible both for the salvation of our neighbors and their loss, let us so regulate our life as not only to be sufficient for ourselves (69d) but also to prove an occasion of instruction to others, so that we may draw down on us here and now favor from God, and may in the future enjoy God's loving kindness in generous measure, thanks to the grace and mercy of his only-begotten Son, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, power and honor, now and forever, for ages of ages. Amen.

HOMILY 8

*"God said: 'Let us make a human being in our image and likeness. Let them have control of the fish of the sea and the birds of heaven, the cattle and the wild beasts, all the earth and all the reptiles creeping upon the earth.'"*¹



COME NOW. Yesterday you listened with great enthusiasm to the words we had for you. So today, too, let us propose for your consideration (70a), my dear people, the text just read, first exhorting you to attend carefully to what is said, and to place within the recesses of your mind what was said before, lest we go to all this trouble idly and to no purpose. This, after all, is the object of our earnest effort, that you would know precisely the power of the Scriptures so as not merely to understand them yourselves but also to become teachers of them to others, and so be in a position, according to blessed Paul, to edify one another.² I mean, if you advance in the Lord, and manifest some progress in the teaching of spiritual things, you will also bring great joy to our hearts. For us, you see, this is complete success and the height of festivity. Scripture says, remember: "What is our hope, our joy, the crown of our boasting? Is it not yourselves"³ and your progress in God's eyes?

(2) Every teacher, on seeing the disciples taking care to rivet in their mind the memory of the earliest lessons and (70b) showing something for it in practice, more readily entrusts them with the knowledge of the following lessons. Just so in our case: the more we see your minds stimulated, your interest on the increase, and your reasoning taking flight, the more

1. Gn 1.26, Chrysostom's text including the wild beasts, not found in other LXX texts.

2. Cf. 1 Thes 5.11.

3. 1 Thes 2.19.

do we wax enthusiastic for lavishing upon you more generous instruction. That is to say, the more we pour upon you these spiritual streams, the greater the influx upon us for the sake of your edification, for the salvation of your soul. You see, in this case things don't happen the way they do with money. In that case, you know, the man paying money to his neighbor reduces his own wealth: the more he pays, the more his fortune diminishes. It is quite the opposite with spiritual things: here our resources grow greater, the extent of this spiritual wealth is expanded when (70c) we lavishly pour out the flood of our teaching to those anxious to draw from it.

(3) Since, therefore, this exercise proves an occasion of greater wealth and abundance for us, and you are insatiable in regard to this spiritual nourishment, come now, let us see what it is today also blessed Moses is teaching us through the text we've read, or rather what the grace of the Spirit has to say to us all through his tongue. "God said," the text goes on, "'Let us make a human being in our image and likeness.'" Let us not rush idly by what is said, dearly beloved; instead, let us investigate each expression, get right to the depth of its meaning, and divine the force concealed in these brief phrases. I mean, although the words may be few, immense is the treasure concealed in them; we must remain alert and vigilant and not stop short at the surface. Likewise with people endeavoring to dig up this material treasure:⁴ they don't simply (70d) dig around on the ground or study the surface; instead, they go right to the bottom and penetrate to the bowels of the earth, and thus separate the gold from the soil through their own skill, and despite much toil and sweat manage to find just a few nuggets. In our case it is nothing like that: the effort is small, the yield beyond telling. Such, you see, are all spiritual realities.

(4) Accordingly, let us not be found wanting by comparison with those who get excited about material things; let us in our turn search diligently for this spiritual treasure stored up in

4. One of Chrysostom's most frequently employed figures for the salutary effect of the inspired Word, as was mentioned above (Homily 3, note 3).

these words. Let us see first what is the new and surprising element in the words, and why the blessed author employed such a novel turn of phrase—or rather the loving God through the speech of the author. The text says: “Let us make a human being (71a) in our image and likeness.” A little time before, remember, we heard him saying, after the creation of heaven and earth, “Let light be made” and “Let a firmament be made in the middle of the water;” and again, “Let the water be gathered together into one mass, and let the dry land appear,” and “Let lights be made,” and “Let the waters produce reptiles with living souls.” Did you see the whole of creation made in those five days merely by word and command? Notice today how great the difference in the words. That is, no longer does it say, Let a human being be created. Instead, what? “Let us make a human being in our image and likeness.” What is new in this? What is strange? Who on earth is this creature now being made whose making required in the Creator such planning and care? Don’t be surprised, dearly beloved. I mean, (71b) the human being is the creature more important than all the other visible beings, and for this creature all the others have been produced—sky, earth, sea, sun, moon, stars, the reptiles, the cattle, all the brute beasts.

(5) Why is it, you ask, that if this creature is more important than all these, it is brought forth after them? A good question. Let me draw a comparison with a king on the point of entering a city on a visit: his bodyguard has to be sent on ahead to have the palace in readiness, and thus the king may enter his palace. Well now, in just the same way in this case the Creator, as though on the point of installing some king and ruler over everything on earth, first erected the whole of this scenery, and then brought forth the one destined to preside over it, showing us through the created things themselves what importance he gave to this creature.

(6) But let us put a question to a Jew, and see what he says to that (71c) verse, “Let us make a human being in our image.” The words, after all, are from Moses, whom they claim to believe, but in fact do not believe. As Christ says, “If you be-

lieved Moses, you would believe me.”⁵ While, however, the words remain with them, their true meaning remains with us.⁶ So to whom is the phrase addressed, “Let us make a human being,” and to whom does the Lord propose this plan? Not because he has need of plan and consideration—perish the thought; instead, he intends through the pretext of words to indicate the surpassing importance which he demonstrates in regard to the human creature. What then do they say, these people who still have a veil lying over their hearts⁷ and refuse to understand what is contained in these words?

(7) O what stupidity! what idiocy! What reason do you have for (71d) saying, human being that you are, that an angel is party to the counsels of the Lord, creatures sharing the Creator’s thought? Not for angels is it to be party to the counsels of the Lord, but to stand in waiting and fulfil sacred ministry. To grasp this, listen to Isaiah, most articulate of the prophets, when he says about the angelic powers above that “I saw the Cherubim and the Seraphim standing at God’s right hand; they kept covering their faces and feet with their wings.”⁸ From which it is obvious that they could not bear the radiance beaming from that source, but stood in great fear and trembling. To stand in waiting before the Lord is, after all, proper

5. Jn 5.46.

6. This lengthy commentary on *Genesis*, as also that on the *Psalms*, shows Chrysostom’s esteem for the Old Testament, even if his commentaries on the New Testament are more numerous. He outlines most fully his thinking on the relationship between the testaments in the two homilies *De Obscuritate Prophetiarum*. His concern that the Jews should arrive at a true appreciation of the OT by finding Christ there appears also in his Homily on Ps CIX:

“I say this, not to set up the Old Testament in opposition to the New—perish the thought—but from a wish to put paid to the Jews’ obtuseness. You see, what is contained in either testament is given to us by God and owes its origin to him; I only want to demonstrate the fact that the Jew who disallows the biblical references to Christ distorts the greater part of the inspired writings, nor could he clearly show the nobility of the Old Testament if he refused to admit the New.” (PG 55,267)

7. Cf. 2 Cor 3.15.

8. A precis of Is 6.1–2. Chrysostom has a series of six homilies on the opening verses of ch.6 of Isaiah, which he finds such a fertile field for a study of the inspiration of Scripture. See R. Hill, “St. John Chrysostom’s teaching on inspiration in ‘Six homilies on Isaiah,’” *VigC* 22 (1968) 19–37.

to creatures. These people, however, who understand nothing of what is contained in the words, idly say the first thing that comes into their head. Hence it falls to us (72a) to refute their stupidity and teach the children of the Church the truth of the words.

(8) So who is this to whom he says, "Let us make a human being"?⁹ Who else is it than the Angel of Great Counsel, Wonderful Counsellor, Figure of Authority, Prince of Peace, Father of the age to come,¹⁰ Only-begotten Son of God, like the Father in being, through whom all things were created? To him is said, "Let us make a human being in our image and likeness." This text also deals a mortal blow to those entertaining the position of Arius. I mean, he did not say by way of command, Make such a creature, as though to a subordinate or to one inferior in being, but "Let us make" with great deference to an equal. And what follows shows us further the equality in being; it says, you see, "Let us make a human being in our image and likeness." Here again, however, other heretics arise (72b) assailing the dogmas of the Church; they say, Look: he said, "In our image"—and from these words they want to speak of the divine in human terms, which is the ultimate example of error, namely, to cast in human form him who is without shape, without appearance, without change, and to attribute limbs and forms to the one who has no body. What could match this madness, people not simply refusing to derive any profit from the teaching of the inspired¹¹ Scriptures, but even incurring severe harm from them? I mean, they are in a similar predicament to people who are ill and suffering impairment of their bodily vision: just as the latter have a revulsion for the sunlight on account of their weakness of vision and invalids turn away from the healthier foods, so

9. This is still a challenging question for Jewish commentators like Speiser, who translates the Heb. text of 1.26 as "I will make;" see also his note on the verse (*Genesis* 4-7).

10. Is 9.6.

11. *Theopneustos* is the adjective Chrysostom employs of the Scriptures here and elsewhere as "inspired"; his commonest verb for the charism is *en-echo*. See greater detail in R. Hill, "Chrysostom's terminology for the inspired Word," *EB* 41 (1983) 367-373.

too those ailing in spirit and handicapped in their mind's vision (72c) have lost the power to look directly at the light of truth.

(9) So let us do for them what lies in our power and offer them a helping hand, conversing with them in a spirit of great kindness. Blessed Paul, after all, encouraged us to do this when he said, "Instruct your adversaries with gentleness, in the hope that God will grant them a change of heart leading to knowledge of truth, and they may return to a sober mind and escape from the snare of the devil, by whom they were held as captives at his pleasure."¹² Do you see how he declared in the words he chose that they were overcome, as it were, by some drunken stupor? To say, "return to a sober mind," after all, suggested they were in a state of intoxication. Likewise he says, "held captive by the devil," as though to say they are ensnared in traps. What is required of us is much kindness and tolerance so as to be able to rescue them (72d) and lead them out of the devil's snares. So let us say to them, Make your escape slowly but surely, look towards the light of righteousness, study the precision of the words. You see, in saying, "Let us make a human being in our image and likeness," he did not stop there, but through the following verse made clear to us what was the reason for choosing the word "image." What in fact does the text go on to say? "Let them have control of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven, and all the reptiles creeping on the earth." So "image" refers to the matter of control, not anything else,¹³ in other words, God created the human being as having control of everything on earth, and nothing on earth is greater than the human being, under whose authority everything falls.

(10) Yet if, despite such great precision in terms, there are

12. 2 Tim 2.25-26.

13. A perennial puzzle for Gn commentators, the meaning of "image and likeness," generally approached by them (as by Chrysostom here) through the sequence of ideas in the text. Only in recent years has the discovery of the Ebla tablets deciphered the notion of *demuth*, "likeness," in ancient Heb. as a deputy deity, with responsibility (in this case) for all creation. No wonder the text is so pregnant for conservationists, and "image" is so rich a term for Paul in his Christology.

still those spoiling for a fight who would want to say "image" is used in terms (73a) of form, we will say to them: that means he is not only man but also woman, for both have the same form. But this would make no sense. I mean, listen to Paul's words: "It is not proper for a man to cover his head, being image and glory of God, whereas the woman is man's glory."¹⁴ One is in command, the other is subordinate, just as God had also said to woman from the beginning, "your yearning will be for your husband, and he will be your master."¹⁵ You see, since it is on the basis of command that the image was received and not on the basis of form, man commands everything whereas woman is subservient¹⁶—hence Paul's words about man, that he is constituted God's image and glory, whereas woman is man's glory. If, however, he had been speaking about form, he would not have distinguished between them, man and woman being identical in type, after all.

(11) Do you see the full truth of it, (73b) how he left us no grounds for defense on the part of those bent on being brazen? All the same, even if this is the situation, let us not desist from our patience in dealing with these people, "in the hope that God will grant them a change of heart leading to knowledge of truth." So let us not slacken in our efforts to show great kindness, in the expectation of being able to wrest them from the devil's deceit; and let us, if we think fit, propose to them blessed Paul's words addressed to the citizens of Athens: "We ought not think the deity is like gold, silver, or stone, or carving from man's skill or imagination."¹⁷ Do you notice the wise teacher, with how much precision he disposes of every error of theirs? I mean, he says not only that the deity is to be distinguished from bodily figure but that human imagining could not shape anything of the kind.

14. 1 Cor 11.7.

15. Gn 3.16.

16. Chrysostom's sexism, commented on in Introduction 14, seems particularly perverse here; he seems to be invoking Paul's (cultural) distinction between man (*anēr*, male) and woman (*gunē*) to make a case that Gn 1.26, in speaking of the human being (*anthrōpos*), means "man" only in the sense of "male."

17. Acts 17.29.

(12) Argue (73c) the point with them constantly on these matters and don't desist from bringing them to their attention in the hope that they may yield, in the hope that they may agree to look at the full face of truth. And while not desisting from debate with them in a spirit of great kindness and certainty, hold fast yourselves, I urge you, to the dogmas of the Church with close attention, without confusing the drift of the expression. Instead, argue the point in friendly exchange with Jews, on the one hand, showing them the words have reference not to some one of the ministering powers but to the only-begotten Son of God himself; to those holding Arian views, on the other hand, prove from this text the Son's equality with the Father; and to those imagining the deity has human form bring into play the words of blessed Paul. (73d) Root out those noxious ailments springing up like weeds among the dogmas of the Church,¹⁸ and at the same time see to it that religious teachings are strengthened in them.

(13) You see, I wish and pray that you would all hold fast to right order as teachers, that you would not simply be listeners to what is said by us but also transmit it to others, casting your net for those still in error so as to bring them to the way of truth—as Paul says, “Edify one another,”¹⁹ and, “With fear and trembling work out your own salvation.”²⁰ In this way we will have the satisfaction of seeing the Church grow in numbers, and you will enjoy more abundant favor from above through the great care you show for your members. God, you know, does not wish Christians to be concerned only for themselves but also to edify others, not simply through their teaching but also through their lifestyle and the way they live it; after all, nothing is such an attraction to the way of truth as probity of life—in other words, (74a) people pay less attention to what we say than to what we do. As proof that this is

18. “The dogmas of the Church” is not a frequent phrase in Chrysostom's mouth; his appeal to authority is normally an appeal to the Scriptures. In this case of Trinitarian and Christological dogmas, however, we must remember Chrysostom is living in the wake of the Councils of Nicæa (325) and Constantinople (381).

19. 1 Thes 5.11.

20. Phil 2.12.

the case—I mean, even if we debate the issue thousands of times and argue about forgiveness but do nothing to demonstrate it in practice, the good our words do will not match the harm done by our behavior; whereas if we give demonstration of it in practice before our talking and after our talking, we will be shown to be trustworthy in preaching what we practice, since Christ also has declared such people blessed in the words, “Blessed is the one who does and teaches”²¹—as proof, then, consider how he put doing before teaching. You see, provided practice comes first, even if teaching doesn’t follow, the actions themselves suffice to teach more conspicuously than words the people observing us.

(14) Let us, therefore, in all cases give attention to teaching in action first and later in words, (74b) lest we too hear from Paul, “You teach others, but don’t you teach yourself?”²² And whenever we intend to advise someone to bring their conduct into line in the important things in life, let us be careful to bring ourselves into line in these matters so as to lend greater conviction to our teaching; let our every care be for the salvation of souls, and for ways of curbing the motions of the flesh and demonstrating a real fast. Abstinence from food, after all, is undertaken for this purpose, to curb the exuberance of the flesh and bring the beast under control. The person fasting ought most of all keep anger in check, learn the lesson of mildness and kindness, have a contrite heart, banish the flood of unworthy passions, (74c) keep before one’s eyes that un-sleeping eye and that incorruptible tribunal, avoid becoming enthralled by money, be lavish in almsgiving, drive all ill-will to one’s neighbor from the soul. This is real fasting, as Isaiah says when speaking as God’s mouthpiece: “I did not choose this fast, says the Lord—not to bend your neck like a dog collar, nor to make your bed of dust and ashes, not to call a fast of this kind acceptable, says the Lord.” So what kind, pray? “Loose the bonds of crippling contracts,” he says, “share your bread with the hungry, welcome the homeless poor into your home.” And if you do these things, he says, “then your Light

21. A precis of Mt 5.19.

22. Rom 2.21.

will burst forth like the dawn, and your healing (74d) will quickly emerge."²³

(15) Do you see, dearly beloved, what true fasting really is? Let us perform this kind, and not entertain the facile notion held by many that the essence of fasting lies in going without food till evening. This is not the end in view, but that we should demonstrate, along with abstinence from food, abstinence also from whatever is harmful, and should give close attention to spiritual duties. The person fasting ought to be reserved, peaceful, meek, humble, indifferent to the esteem of this world. You see, just as one has neglected the soul, so it is necessary to neglect empty esteem as well, and to have regard only for him who examines our inmost being,²⁴ and with great care to direct prayers and confessions (75a) to God, and provide for oneself according to one's ability the help that comes from almsgiving.

(16) This precept, after all, this most of all is able to cancel all our sins and snatch us from the fire of Gehenna, provided we perform it with generosity and don't do it to show off to people. Why do I say not to show off? You see, if we are right-minded, we ought to perform this action solely for the reason that it is the right thing to do and a mark of solidarity with our fellows, not for the rewards promised from the Lord. But when we are unable to conjure up any inspiring motive, let us seek to perform the deed for the right reason, never angling after the good opinion of people, lest we have the bad fortune to lose the reward while at the same time outlaying the expense.

(17) This precaution applies not only to almsgiving; instead, let us in the case of every spiritual good deed take care (75b) and do nothing with a view to people's esteem, since nothing will be of any benefit to us, whether we fast or pray, whether we show mercy or do anything else, unless it is done solely for him who knows both what escapes people's attention and what lies hidden in the depths of our heart. If, after all, you have an eye to rewards from him, human being that you are, why wish

23. Is 58.5-8.

24. Cf Ps 7.9.

to be commended by your fellow human being? Why say commended? frequently such a person, instead of commending you, belittles you. There are plenty of people, you know, who deep down are so miserable as to misrepresent even our finer achievements. So why, tell me, put a premium on their distorted judgment? You see, there is no single thing done by us that escapes the notice of that unsleeping eye, so we should keep that in mind (75c) and manage our life with scrupulous care like people due before long to render an account of our words, our deeds and our very thoughts.

(18) Accordingly, let us not neglect our own salvation. You see, dearly beloved, nothing is as important as virtue; virtue it is, after all, that snatches us from Gehenna in the world to come and bestows on us the enjoyment of the kingdom of heaven, and in this world renders us superior to all those spending their efforts in idle and vain schemes—not simply human beings, but the very demons as well—and makes us stronger than the enemy of our salvation (I mean the devil). So what could be more important than virtue when it makes those striving for it superior not only to scheming human beings but also the demons? Virtue it is to scorn all human affairs, (75d) to keep the mind on future realities at each hour of the day, to seek no present good but to know that everything human is a shadow and a dream or even worse. Virtue it is to adopt the attitude of a corpse in regard to the affairs of this life and like a corpse take no active interest in what threatens the soul's salvation, but only in regard to spiritual things to be alive and take active interest, as Paul also said. "I am alive, though it is no longer me but Christ alive in me."²⁵

(19) Accordingly, dearly beloved, let us do everything as people who have put on Christ, and not grieve the Holy Spirit. So whenever we are disquieted by passion, or untimely desire, or anger, or rage, or envy, let us think of him who dwells within us, let us drive far away every such inclination. Let our regard be (76a) for the pre-eminence of grace showered on us by God and let us curb all the passions of the flesh, so that

25. Gal 2.20.

after we have striven lawfully in this brief and transient existence we may be rewarded with that marvellous crown in the time to come—a fearful time for sinners but a time to be longed for by those clad in virtue—and that we may be found worthy of those unspeakable goods, thanks to the grace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, power and honor, now and forever, for ages of ages. Amen.

HOMILY 9

*On what follows the verse, "Let us make a human being in our image,"
and against those who ask, Why were the wild beasts created?
and, What good comes from their being made?
And to prove that this most of all shows regard for the human being
and God's unspeakable love.*



SO BEGIN (76b) BY AN analogy with hardworking farmers. Whenever they see a rich pasture with great depth of soil, they sow the seed liberally and give it their constant and undivided attention, surveying the scene each day in case somewhere some useless thing capable of damaging the seeds should thwart the efforts they have put into it. Now, in exactly the same way we too have seen your spiritual hunger and your great readiness to listen, and each day we have been exerting ourselves to have the thinking of the Holy Scriptures enter your mind; we have also shown to you what can harm this spiritual seed, lest you be caught out and the sound teaching of the dogmas be undermined by the assaults of people endeavouring to infiltrate the Church's dogmas with notions from their own reasoning. (76c) To you falls the task of scrupulously safeguarding what has been entrusted to you and preserving the memory of it intact so that you can follow with ease the sequel. You see, if the present opportunity is not taken for us to go rather deeply into the meaning, and for you to develop your understanding, now that it is the season of Lent, now that our limbs are more nimble for swimming and our mental vision sharper, without the hindrance of the evil current of luxury, but with our spirit strengthened against drowning, when on earth will it be possible for us to achieve it? When luxury, drunkenness and gluttony are rampant, and the evils they spawn?

(2) Don't you see that people wanting to find the gems that come from the sea don't make the discovery just by sitting down at the water's edge and counting the waves, but cast themselves into deep water, descend into the very bosom of the deep, (76d) as you might say, and in this fashion chance upon the things they're looking for? Yet what great benefit would the discovery of these gems bring to your life? Hopefully they would bring no great harm or injury. From this source, after all, spring a multitude of troubles, from the desire for money and the frenzy these things cause. Still, despite the great harm arising from them, people obsessed with these things stop at nothing: they expose themselves to danger and undergo great effort so as to be able to find what they're looking for. In the case of the Holy Scriptures, on the contrary, and these spiritual gems of great value, there is no cause for suspecting danger, the effort is not great whereas the gain is beyond telling, provided we enthusiastically put into it what lies in our power. Grace, you see, is always active, seeking those (77a) that welcome it with readiness. Such, after all, is our Lord: when he sees an alert soul and fervent desire, out of his own prodigality he lavishes upon it riches of his that surpass the request being made.

(3) Accordingly, dearly beloved, knowing this as you do, purify your thinking of the affairs of this life, open wide the horizons of your mind, welcome with great enthusiasm what the Spirit furnishes us with, so that like rich and fruitful soil you may produce a crop in excess of what is sown—in one case a hundredfold, in another sixtyfold, in another thirtyfold. You heard on the previous days of the ineffable wisdom of the artificer of all visible realities, and how he produced everything solely by his word and desire. He said, remember, “Let it be made,” and it was made, and immediately all the elements were produced; (77b) his word sufficed for the sustenance of all created things, not simply because it was a word but because it was God's word.

(4) You recall the arguments we brought to bear against those saying that existing things came into being from underlying matter and substituting their own folly for the dogmas

of the Church. You learnt why, on the one hand, he produced the sky in finished form, but left the earth shapeless and incomplete. We gave you, remember, at that point two reasons for this: firstly, so that you might learn the power of the Lord from the more complete thing and not waver in your reasoning with the thought that it was created out of lack of power; and secondly, since the earth has been created as mother and nurse for us, and from it we are nourished and enjoy all other things, and to it we return in the end, being as it is for us all both homeland and tomb, (77c) he shows it to us shapeless from the beginning in case the very pressure of necessity, if nothing else, should lead us to conjure up some grandiose ideas about it, instead of learning even through these very things that all the above-mentioned advantages are to be attributed no longer to the nature of the earth but to the power of the Creator. Again, you learnt how he effected the separation of the waters by providing for the creation of this visible firmament; you saw the living beings arising both from the waters and from the earth.

(5) We now feel the need to rehearse these details and repeat them for you, brethren, not idly and to no purpose, but that the listeners may have a stronger basis of belief and the details may be riveted more surely in your mind; thus the instruction may be adequate also for those not present on the first occasion, and they may not suffer any handicap from their absence. The reason is that a loving father keeps the leftovers from the table for his absent children so that when they come (77d) they may find the leftovers kept for them as a consolation for their absence. Accordingly, we too have as much care for everyone of you coming along here as for our own limbs, and we make your progress our own pride and glory, wanting you all to be shown to be perfect and mature for the glory of God, the credit of the Church and our boast.

(6) And at the risk of seeming to be a nuisance, come now, I would like briefly to refresh your memory of what was said to you yesterday. You saw the difference between the shaping of the human being and the creation of the other things; you heard the degree of importance he imparted to that founder

of our race, and how in the course of that very shaping he manifested by the down-to-earth quality of the words and expressions¹ the esteem he had for the being about to be created when he said, "Let us make a human being in (78a) our image and likeness." You learnt what is the meaning of "in our image," that it is not in the order of being but a similarity of command, that he spoke not in terms of a formal image but in terms of command—hence the postscript, "Let them have control of the fish of the sea and the birds of heaven, the wild beasts and the reptiles of the earth."

(7) Now, on this matter pagans make a rejoinder to us with the claim that the truth of the sentence is not confirmed in practice; we do not, in fact, control the wild beasts, as was promised, but they control us. But this isn't true, either: whenever a human being comes on the scene, at once the wild animals take to flight. On the other hand, if at some time we are harmed by them when they're under the pressure of starvation or we attack them, this evidently happens not because of their control over us but from some fault of ours. Likewise when brigands attack us and find us not slothful (78b) but armed to the teeth, it's not an example of their power but of our care for our own welfare. Meantime let us listen to the words of the text; it says, "Let us make a human being in our image and likeness." As the word "image" indicated a similitude of command, so too "likeness," with the result that we become like God to the extent of our human power²—that is to say, we resemble him in our gentleness and mildness and in regard to virtue, as Christ also says, "Be like your Father in heaven."³ You see, just as on this wide and spacious earth

1. This is another favorite term of Chrysostom's, basic to his thinking on Scripture and the "considerateness" it exemplifies: *pachutēs*, the solid, material, down-to-earth, incarnational character of biblical language, employed by divine and human authors in view of our "limitations." It is clearly an Antiochene notion, not likely to receive much attention in Alexandrian speculation.

2. Chrysostom astutely divines the sense of "image," as modern archeological discoveries have confirmed (cf. Homily 8, note 13 above)—and then typically gives a moral twist to his exegesis.

3. Mt 5.45.

some animals are tamer and others more ferocious, so too in the wide spaces of our soul some of our ideas are more lethargic and resemble brute beasts, others more ferocious and savage. So there is need to control (78c) and tame them and submit them to the rule of reason. How do you get control of the wildness of thought, you ask? What are you saying, human being that you are? We subdue lions and tame their spirit, and do you doubt if you're able to transform the ferocity of your thinking into mildness? Further, ferocity is naturally proper to wild beasts and mildness unnatural, whereas the opposite is true in your case: mildness is natural, ferocity and savagery unnatural. Are you, then, who expel the natural and induce the unnatural in wild animals, unable yourself to maintain what is natural? What great condemnation this brings against you! Something in fact that is more remarkable and surprising still is this: Although in a lion's nature there is the added difficulty that the lion is a wild beast deprived of reason, we still often see lions led meekly through the market place, (78d) and many people often throw money from their shops to the person getting some reward for skill and cunning in taming the wild beast. However, in a person reason is present, and the fear of God, and many other advantages from other sources—so don't adduce excuses and pretexts. It is, after all, quite within your capabilities to be meek and mild and gentle, if you have the good will. The text says, "Let us make a human being in our image and likeness."

(8) But let us return to the question proposed before. It emerges, you know, from what we've said that the human being from the very beginning had complete control of the wild beasts; the text says, remember, "Let them have control of the fish of the sea and the birds of heaven, the wild beasts and the reptiles of the earth." The fact that now we have fear and dread of the wild animals and have lost control of them, I personally don't dispute; but this doesn't (79a) betray a false promise on God's part. From the beginning, you see, things weren't like this; instead, the wild beasts were in fear and trembling, and responded to direction. But when through disobedience human beings forfeited their position of trust,

their control was also lost. As evidence, after all, that everything was placed under the human being's control, listen to Scripture saying, "He brought the wild animals and all the brute beasts to Adam to see what he would call them."⁴ And seeing the animals near him, he didn't shrink back, but like a master giving names to slaves in his service, he gave them all names; the text says, "They each bore the name Adam gave them," this being a symbol of his dominion. Hence God was wanting to teach him through this the dignity of his authority, so he entrusted to him the giving of names.

(9) So this instance (79b) suffices to demonstrate the fact that from the beginning the wild beasts were not an object of terror to the human being; yet there is another instance no less significant and much clearer. Namely? The serpent's conversation with the woman. You see, had the animals been frightening to human beings, the woman at sight of the serpent would not have stood her ground, would not have taken its advice, would not have conversed with it so comfortably; instead, she would have been terrified by its appearance and taken flight. In fact, however, she both converses with it and shows no fear; this fear, after all, is not yet to the fore.

(10) But once sin came on the scene, there was evidently loss both of esteem and of authority. Just as in the case of servants those that enjoy a good name are held in fear by their fellow servants whereas those that have given offence fear the others, so too in the case of the human being: while they enjoyed God's trust (79c) they were an object of fear even to the animals, but when they fell they eventually had to fear even the least of their fellow slaves. If you don't hold with what we've said, show me that before sin the beasts were an object of fear to the human being. But you couldn't. If, however, fear came on the scene afterwards, this is also an extraordinary token of God's loving kindness. I mean, if after the com-

4. A paraphrase of Gn 2.19. Chrysostom, of course, is unlikely to draw to his congregation's attention that he is here switching from one creation narrative (ch.1) to another (ch.2)—if only because he is unaware of it himself. See Introduction 16 for his relatively uncritical scholarship, which emerges also in his general line of argumentation here and elsewhere.

mandment had been broken by the human beings the esteem accorded them had remained unimpaired, they would not easily have risen from their fall. You see, when obedient and disobedient people enjoy the same esteem, they are more inclined to evil and don't quickly recover from evil. After all, if under the pressure of fear, retribution and punishment they do not come to their senses, what condition would they be in if they suffered nothing for the terrible mistakes they made? (79d) So it is out of his providential care for us that he has removed us from our position of control.

(11) Consider now, I ask you, dearly beloved, in this instance God's ineffable love as well, how, on the one hand, Adam infringed the whole commandment and completely broke the law, while, on the other hand, God in his loving kindness proved his goodness superior to our transgressions and did not cancel all our esteem nor remove the human being from all control. Instead, he withdrew from their control only those beings that did not have the greatest contribution to make to their livelihood, whereas the most necessary and useful creatures which performed great service to our living he allowed to remain in subjection and servitude. He left at any rate herds of cattle to draw the plough, to till the soil, to sow the seed; he left the beasts of burden to assist our efforts in transporting heavy loads; he left the flocks of sheep (80a) so that we might have sufficient supply of garments for clothing; and he left other kinds of animals to supply us with plenty of resources. You see, though in punishing the human being for disobedience he said "In the sweat of your brow may you eat your bread,"⁵ he took care, lest this sweat and toil be unbearable, to lighten the pressure and burden of work with the multitude of beasts sharing with us the labor and distress. He acted in precisely the way a loving and caring master would in punishing his servant, following the punishing with some healing; in just this way God brings condemnation to the sinner and then wants to render this condemnation lighter in every way, condemning us to ceaseless toil and sweat, on the

5. Gn 3.19.

one hand, and providing many kinds of brute beasts to share the labor with us on the other. (8ob) The result is that you have the bestowal of esteem, and its being taken back, the implanting of fear of wild beasts—all done, if you study it precisely and in a spirit of gratitude, with an abundance of wisdom, of care, of love.

(12) Now, let us give thanks to him for all these favors and be grateful to him for doing us all these kindnesses. He is, after all, not looking for anything heavy and burdensome from us—simply acknowledgement of such favors and thanksgiving to him for them. Not that he needs it, being self-sufficient as he is, but for us to learn to win over the supplier of good things, and not to be ungrateful, but to give evidence of virtue that is worthy of these kindnesses and such great care. This is the way, after all, for us to prompt him to even greater care of us. So let us not grow slack, I beseech you; instead, let each of us, as each hour passes and to the extent of our capabilities, (8oc) take stock within himself of the favors done to us, not only those shared with others but also personal ones, not only those acknowledged and obvious to all, but also individual ones that have escaped most people's notice, such being the way to render unceasing thanks to the Lord. This is the highest form of sacrifice, this is a perfect offering, this will prove the basis of confidence for us—just how, I will tell you.

(13) You see, people who constantly rehearse these things in their own mind come to gain a precious knowledge of their own unworthiness, on the one hand, and on the other to realize God's unspeakable and surpassing love, as well as to focus not on what their sins deserve but on his goodness. They then conduct their affairs in the following way: they form a humble opinion of themselves, keep a tight control on their reasoning, suppress any conceit or arrogance, learn to stay within limits, to rise above worldly opinion, to set all visible realities at naught, (8od) to ponder future goods and the life that has neither limit nor end. The person so disposed in soul offers to God a true and acceptable sacrifice, as the biblical author says: "A sacrifice to God is a contrite spirit; a contrite and humble

heart God does not despise."⁶ It is not, after all, sanctions and punishments that win over right-minded servants so much as acts of kindness and the knowledge that they have not been punished according to their deserts.

(14) Let us accordingly keep a tight control on our reasoning, I beseech you, and form a humble opinion of ourselves, especially at this time when the season of fasting provides assistance to that end. You see, if we have this disposition, we will be able both to pray with mind unfettered and win grace from above by confessing our sins. To learn that (81a) the Lord is pleased with such souls, listen to his words: "'On whom shall I look with favor if not on the person of meekness and peace and the one who trembles at my words?'"⁷ Hence Christ had this to say as well: "Learn from me that I am meek and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your soul."⁸ After all, people of humble disposition could never be swept into a rage or become angry with their neighbor, since their spirit is so much at peace and occupied only with its own concerns. What could be more blessed than a soul disposed like this? Such a person rests continually in the shelter of harbor far from every storm, revelling in the calm of reason. Hence Christ also said: "You will find rest for your soul." Just as therefore the person who has reduced to calm all these passions enjoys much rest, so slothful and diffident people, unable (81b) to keep in due control the passions rising within them, are exposed to continual storms, have war on their hands at the home front, can be thrown into disarray without anyone needing to be present, and have to endure much buffeting from tempests; hence, with the impact of the billows and the onset of the hurricane of evil blasts, they often go under, as their craft sinks under them from the helmsman's ineptitude.

(15) So, we ought stay alert and clear-headed, and pay constant and unremitting attention to the salvation of our soul. The Christian, you see, must be ever equipped to deal with the passions of the flesh, keep fresh in mind the laws given us

6. Ps 51.17.

8. Mt 11.29.

7. Is 66.2.

by the common Lord of all and shelter behind the protection they give, take advantage of his long-suffering in our regard no more than is necessary, and not postpone humbling ourselves till harsh experience comes, lest it be said about us also, (81c) "When he brought them to the point of death, then they turned to him."⁹ Having fasting as our ally, therefore, dearly beloved, let us all hasten to the confession of our sins, refrain from all wickedness, and practice every virtue. This, after all, is what the blessed author David teaches when he says, "Turn from evil and do good."¹⁰ Provided we conduct ourselves in this way, and demonstrate along with abstinence from food likewise abstinence from evil, we will ourselves be able to enjoy greater confidence and be found worthy of a more generous share of loving kindness from God both in this life and on that fearful day yet to come, thanks to the prayers and intercession of those acceptable to him and the (81d) grace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, power and honor, now and forever, for ages of ages. Amen.

9. Ps 78.34.

10. Ps 37.27.

HOMILY 10

*An exhortation to those ashamed to attend the evening congregation after eating; and from the verse, "Let us make a human being in our image and likeness," up to the verse, "God made the human being; in God's image he made them; male and female he made them."*¹



OUR CONGREGATION today is smaller, and the participants in the action less numerous. Why is this, and what is responsible for it? Perhaps some people are ashamed to attend this spiritual banquet after their material repast, and this is responsible for their absence. Let them, however, heed the words of the wise man: "Shame it is that leads to sin, and shame it is that is glory and grace."² It is not cause for shame for a person to have partaken of (82a) a material repast and then come to spiritual food. You see, spiritual affairs are not divided into distinct times like human affairs; in other words, discourse on spiritual topics is suited to any time of the day. Why do I say time of the day? Even if night falls, that is no obstacle to spiritual teaching. Hence Paul said in writing to Timothy, "Press on whether the time is ripe or not: argue, censure, cajole."³ Listen further to blessed Luke when he says that "as Paul was due to leave Troas the next day, he began talking to them and prolonged his discourse to midnight."⁴ Was time a problem for him, I ask you, or did it interrupt the thread of his teaching? No. The alert listener, (82b) even after dining, would be in a suitable condition for this spiritual gathering, just as by the same token the slothful⁵ and

1. Gn 1.27.

2. Sir 4.21.

3. 2 Tm 4.2.

4. Acts 20.7.

5. Again it is *rhathumia*—indifference, sloth, negligence, carelessness—that Chrysostom sees as the besetting weakness of the Christian.

dilatory person even on an empty stomach would get no benefit from it.

(2) I'm not making this point to undermine the importance of fasting—God forbid: on the contrary, I'm all in favor of it. Instead, my intention is to teach you to take an active part in spiritual matters with alert mind, not just follow along out of habit. The shameful thing, you see, is not attendance at this spiritual teaching after partaking of food, but attendance with an attitude of sloth, addiction to passion, and failure to control the movements of the flesh. There is nothing wrong with eating—God forbid; the harmful thing is gluttony, stuffing yourself with food in excess of need, and ruining your stomach—something, after all, that destroys even the pleasure that comes from food. (82c) So, too, in like manner, there is nothing wrong with drinking in moderation, but rather with surrendering to drunkenness and losing control of your reasoning through excess. If, however, dearly beloved, you are unable to go a whole day without food because of physical weakness, no right-minded person could find fault with you in this. We have, you see, a gentle and loving Lord who demands nothing of us beyond our capabilities. In other words, it is not arbitrarily that he looks for fasting and abstinence from food to be performed by us, nor simply for the sake of our remaining without food, but rather that we may be detached from things of this life and devote all our spare time to spiritual matters. If we conduct our lives with sober mind, use all our spare time in spiritual matters, eat only for nourishment (82d) and spend our whole life in good practices, we would have no need of the help that comes from fasting. But since human nature is lazy and is given rather to indulgence and luxury, the loving Lord accordingly like a kindly father devised for us the healing that comes from fasting so that the effects of luxury might be cut out of us and we might replace worldly concerns with performance of spiritual exercises.

(3) So, if there are some of the congregation here who because of bodily weakness are prevented from going without food and incapable of doing so, I advise them both to come to terms with their bodily weakness, and not to deprive them-

selves of this spiritual instruction (83a) but rather to show greater zeal for it. There are, after all, better ways than abstinence from food to open for us the doors of a confident approach to God.⁶ Accordingly, let the person who partakes of food and is unable to fast give evidence of more generous almsgiving, fervent prayers, and a heightened enthusiasm for listening to the divine sayings; let such a person be reconciled with enemies and eradicate from the soul all vindictiveness. If that is the intention, then such a person has practiced real fasting, and the kind the Lord requires most of all. Since he bids abstinence from food to be practiced (83b) for the sake of checking the movements of the flesh, let us render it amenable to the performance of the commandments. If, on the contrary, we are unlikely on account of bodily weakness to bring on ourselves the help that comes from fasting and yet give evidence of greater sloth, we unconsciously do ourselves the greatest harm. You see, if it is true that despite fasting omission of the aforementioned good deeds brings us no benefit, so much the more will this be true in the case of those who, being unable to take advantage of the remedy of fasting, still give evidence of greater sloth.

(4) Now, then, that you have learnt this from us, I beg you, those of you able to fast, develop in yourselves as far as possible this excellent and commendable enthusiasm. After all, "To the extent that our external self is diminished, the interior self is renewed."⁷ Fasting, in other words, holds the body under restraint, checks its unruly movements, (83c) and, on the other hand, renders the soul transparent, gives it wings, makes it light and raises it on high. But as for those of our brethren unable to fast on account of bodily weakness, urge them not to desist from this spiritual diet; teach them and show them, as they have had communicated to them from us also, that it is not the person who eats and drinks in modera-

6. His biographers tell us that Chrysostom could speak from personal experience on the dangers of excessive zeal in fasting, having impaired his health while living the life of a solitary early in his career. Cf. Donald Attwater, *St John Chrysostom* (London 1959) 31.

7. 2 Cor 4.16, somewhat embellished to support Chrysostom's point.

tion that is unworthy of this audience but the lax and dissolute. Address to them also the apostolic dictum, that "the one who eats eats in the Lord, and the one who abstains abstains in the Lord, and gives thanks to God."⁸ So the person fasting gives thanks to God for having the power to be able to withstand the rigors of fasting; and likewise the person who eats gives thanks to God that no harm can come from this for the soul's salvation, if that is God's will. (83d) The loving God, you see, has marked out for us such ways as it is impossible to mention, through which we can, if we wish, share in the utmost confidence.

(5) May our words therefore be sufficient on that subject for those who have been discouraged from attending; may we have removed the grounds for their shame by showing that they have no need to be ashamed on that account, as it is after all not eating that promotes shame but doing something evil. Sin is a great shame: if we commit it, not only ought we be ashamed of it but also conceal it and beat our breasts like people who have fallen—or rather, instead of allowing ourselves to give up in despair, we should hasten to confession and change of heart. Such is the Lord we have, you see, that he looks for nothing more from us (84a) after our committing sin, if perchance we are ensnared through sloth, than the confession of our faults and stopping short, not falling back into the same errors. If, on the other hand, we partake of nourishment in moderation, let us not at all be ashamed; it is the Lord, after all, who has fitted us with a body of such a kind that could not otherwise be sustained without partaking of that food, provided there is no going to excess. In fact, this moderate consumption contributes most of all to good health and condition. Don't you daily observe thousands of disorders stemming from laden tables and immoderate eating? What is the cause of gout? of migraine? of the flood of noxious humors? of countless other ailments? Do they not spring from intemperance and from pouring ourselves more wine than we should? I mean, just as a ship that becomes waterlogged

8. Rom 14.6.

quickly sinks (84b) and slips below the water level, so, too, a person who is given over to gluttony and drunkenness goes head over heels, brings reason down to a low level, and lies for all intents and purposes like a corpse, quite capable, on the one hand, of frequently doing evil, but, on the other hand, in a condition no better than corpses for doing anything good.

(6) Hence I urge you, in the words of blessed Paul, "don't direct care for your body in the direction of desire"⁹ but towards subsistence and the ability to give evidence of much zeal in the performance of spiritual things with great enthusiasm. So, then, put all these considerations to these brethren of ours, and encourage them never to withdraw themselves from this spiritual fare; instead, even if they have eaten, let them come with great enthusiasm so as to receive instruction here and be able to withstand valiantly the devil's wiles. As for you yourselves, come now, let us at this stage lay before you the customary table, (84c) and reward you, dear people, for your zealous attention in listening and discharge the debt we owe you.

(7) You are quite well aware, of course, and recall to mind that we began to talk about the shaping of the human being, but were pressed for time and could not complete the whole lecture; instead we finished the instruction to do with the account of the wild beasts, showing that at first the human being had control over them and then lost it through the sin of disobedience. Hence today we want to complete the balance for you, and thus send you off. For the purpose of making the story clear to you, however, you need to recall where it was we broke off our teaching, so that we can begin from that point and thus complete the rest. So where did we interrupt our sermon? We were speaking on the verse, "Let us make a human being in our image and likeness, and let them have control over the fish of the sea (84d) and the birds of heaven;" the sermon developed into great length and a vast sea of thoughts arose before us, so that it was possible for us to proceed no further, but we stopped short at that point and

9. Rom 13.14.

reached onto none of what follows. Sacred Scripture, in any case, directly added the following: "God made the human being; in God's image he made them; male and female he made them. God blessed them with the words, 'Increase and multiply, fill the earth and gain dominion over it; have control of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all the cattle, the whole earth and all the reptiles creeping on the earth.'" ¹⁰ The words are brief, but the treasure concealed (85a) in the brief words is great. You see, speaking through the Spirit this blessed author wants at this point to teach us something kept from human hearing. When he said, remember, "Let us make a human being," the Creator of all applied his will, as it were, and his thought in demonstrating through this shape the importance given to the creature in process of formation, something he began to teach us before the process began. He also demonstrated the greatness of the control he was entrusting to the being in process of creation; hence, to his words, "Let us make a human being in our image and likeness," he added, "Let them have control of the fish of the sea." See how he reveals to us from the beginning the treasure hidden there. I mean, the biblical author, speaking through the divine Spirit, sees as subsisting and brought into being things not yet subsisting. So why, tell me, after his words, (85b) "Let us make a human being," does he now say, "Let *them* have control"? Evidently he is already revealing to us at this point some mystery lying hidden. Who are to have control? Quite clearly he has spoken this way to hint at the formation of woman. Do you see how there is nothing in Sacred Scripture which is contained there idly or to no purpose? ¹¹ Instead, even the chance word has treasure stored up in it.

(8) Don't be surprised, dearly beloved, at what I've said. Such, after all, is the way with all the biblical authors, to speak of things not yet created as though already created. You see,

10. Gn 1.27-28, where the Heb. makes no reference to the cattle.

11. Over and over again Chrysostom poses this reminder to his congregation of the "precision" of Sacred Scripture, providing him with the recipe for his exegesis/commentary, in which no detail of the text can be passed over. See Introduction 11,21.

since they perceive with the eyes of the spirit things due to happen after a great number of years, and accordingly view things as though already laid out in front of their very eyes, they describe everything in this way. To gain a clear understanding of this, listen to the words of blessed David prophesying in loud tones the events of Christ's crucifixion so many generations before the event: (85c) "They pierced my hands and my feet," and again, "They divided up my garments among themselves."¹² Do you see how ahead of time he announces, as though already happened, things due to take place much later? In this way, too, our blessed author gives us a hint about the formation of woman when he says cryptically, "Let them have control of the fish of the sea." Then, going on, he says further in a clearer way, "God made the human being; in God's image he made them; male and female he made them." Notice how much precision he employs, saying the same thing once and again so that the words could be riveted in the minds of the listeners. You see, if this had not been an object of concern for him, it would have been enough to say, "God made the human being;" but he adds as well, "In God's image he made them." In other words, after teaching us through the previous verses what was the meaning of (85d) "in God's image," accordingly again at this point he repeats the very same notion by saying, "In God's image he made them." Lest he should leave some brazen pretext of controversy to those intent on contesting the Church's dogmas, he presses on a little further and teaches the same things again, that God employed the word "image" in the sense of controlling and having all creatures under subjection. Finally let us see what he is saying in this verse, "God made the human being; in God's image he made them; male and female he made them." What he hinted at above when saying, "Let them have control," here he says more clearly, though he still teaches us this cryptically, since after all he has not yet taught us about the manner of formation or told us where woman comes from. He says, "Male and female he made them." (86a)

12. Ps 22.16,18.

Do you see how he describes what is not yet created as though already created? That's the way, you see, with the eyes of the spirit; I mean, these bodily eyes cannot see visible things in the same way that the eyes of the spirit can see things that are not visible and things that have no subsistence.

(9) So, after saying, "Male and female he made them" as though to bestow a blessing on each of them, he goes on, "God blessed them in the words, 'Increase and multiply, fill the earth and gain dominion over it, and have control of the fish of the sea.'" Behold the remarkable character of the blessing! I mean, those words, "Increase and multiply and fill the earth," anyone could see are said of the brute beasts and the reptiles alike, whereas "Gain dominion and have control" are directed to the man and woman. See the Lord's loving kindness: even before creating her he makes her sharer in this control and bestows on her the blessing. "Have control," the text says, "'of the fish of the (86b) sea, the birds of heaven and all the cattle, the whole earth and all the reptiles creeping on the earth.'" Did you notice the ineffable authority? Did you notice all created things placed under this being's control? No longer entertain casual impressions of this rational being, but rather realize the extent of the esteem and the Lord's benignity towards it, and be amazed at his love beyond all telling.

(10) "God said: 'Lo, I have given you every crop upon all the earth bearing seed fit for sowing, and every tree containing fruit with seed fit for sowing; they are for your food. And for all the beasts of the earth, all the birds of heaven and every reptile creeping on the earth—whatever has a spirit of life in it—I have given every green crop for food.' This is what happened."¹³ See, I ask you, dearly beloved, the precision of the words and the Lord's ineffable love, (86c) and do not pass heedlessly by anything of what is said. "God said," the text reads, "'Lo, I have given you every crop for sowing,'" as though the remark—even this one—is addressed to two people, despite the fact the woman is not yet produced. Then, in order that you may learn his surpassing goodness, see how the signs

¹³ Gn 1.29-30.

of his love do not stop short at the man and the woman still to be produced but reach to the very beasts: after saying to the human beings, “‘They are for your food,’” he added, “‘And for all the beasts of the earth.’”

(11) See again further depths of his loving kindness: he showed concern not only for the tame beasts that meet our needs for food and service but also for the wild beasts. Who could adequately arrive at the extent of this boundless goodness? “‘They are for your food,’” the text says. “‘And for all the beasts of the earth, (86d) all the birds of heaven and every reptile creeping on the earth—whatever has a spirit of life in it—I have given every green crop for food.’” The Lord’s care for the human being created by him emerges in all its fulness. I mean, after producing him and entrusting him with complete control of creation, the good Lord took steps to prevent his being distressed at once from the outset by the sight of the vast number of beasts through a feeling of being powerless to provide adequately for the nourishment of so many animals: before any such thought came to him about this, the Lord comforted him, so to say, by showing him that he along with all the brute beasts had plenty to eat, as the earth provided for their nourishment thanks to the Lord’s direction. So, after saying, “‘They are for your food,’” he immediately added, “‘And for all the beasts of the earth, all the birds of heaven and every reptile creeping on the earth—whatever has a spirit of life in it (87a) I have given every green crop for food.’ This is what happened.”

(12) Whatever the Lord commanded, the text says, took effect, and he established everything in proper order—hence he immediately added, “God saw everything he had made, and behold, it was very good.”¹⁴ Who could adequately extol the precision of Sacred Scripture? I mean, behold here, too, how by speaking one phrase, “God saw everything he had made,” it curbed the tongue of all those endeavoring, despite all this evidence, to gainsay it. “God saw everything he had made,” the text says, “and behold, it was very good.” You see,

14. Gn 1.31.

after saying in the case of each of the created things, "God saw that it was good," at this point when everything was completed, and the works of the sixth day had reached finality, and the being destined (87b) to enjoy all the created things had been brought forth in their midst, the text says: "God saw everything he had made, and behold, it was very good." Notice how by gathering all the created things together under this one word, "everything," it confers commendation on each of them. I mean, it didn't just say "everything" and stop there, but added "that he had made;" nor did it conclude at that point, but said, "And behold it was good," even "very good"—that is to say, "completely good." So when the Lord, the one bringing things from non-being to being, declares creatures to be good and completely good, who would dare, even if bursting with arrogant folly, to open his mouth and gainsay the words uttered by God? After all, amongst the visible creatures it was not only light that was created but also darkness in opposition to light, and not only day but also night (87c) in opposition to day. Amongst the growth springing up from the earth it was not only plants that are useful but also those that are harmful, and not only trees that bear fruit but also those that bear none; and not only tame animals but also wild and unruly ones. Amongst the creatures emerging from the waters it was not only fish but also sea monsters and other fierce creatures. It was not only inhabited land but also the unpeopled; not only level plains but also mountains and woods. Amongst birds it was not only tame ones and those suitable for our food but also wild and unclean ones, hawks and vultures and many others of that kind. Amongst the creatures produced from the earth it was not only tame animals but also snakes, vipers, serpents, lions and leopards. In the sky it was not only showers and kindly breezes but also hail and snow. And (87d) if anyone had a mind to examine the list in detail, you would find in each case not only things considered not useful to us but even harmful, so that no one would be free after this to survey created things and find fault with their origins, saying, What's the purpose of this one? What's the use of this one? This one's well made, but this other one not so.

Hence, Sacred Scripture checks those people endeavoring to show ingratitude, you might say, by adding after the creation of everything on the sixth day, "God saw everything he had made, and behold, it was very good."

(13) What could match this for reliable comment, when the Creator of all gives the verdict in person and says that everything created is good, and even very good? So, whenever you see someone moved by his own reasoning (88a) and intent on gainsaying Sacred Scripture, shun him like a lunatic; or better, don't shun him, but out of pity for his ignorance quote the words from Sacred Scripture and say that "God saw everything he had made" and said "behold, it is very good," and perhaps you will be able to check his unruly tongue. (After all, take the case of human affairs. When we see people of good reputation giving their opinion of things that happen, we don't contradict them, but rather fall in with their opinion and often prefer their opinion to our own. So much the more in the case of the God of all things, the Creator of everything we can see, should we do likewise: we should learn his judgement on things, subdue our own reasonings, and instead of presuming further we should be content with the knowledge that everything has been produced by a word coming from him and by his loving kindness, (88b) and that nothing has been created idly or to no purpose. Even if, through the limitations of our own reasoning, we should be in ignorance of created things, he himself in his own wisdom and thoughtful love produced all things.

(14) "Evening came," the text goes on, "and morning came: a sixth day." At the close of the sixth day he also brought to a close all his creating—hence the addition of the words, "Heaven and earth and all their array were completed."¹⁵ Notice the character of Sacred Scripture, nothing superfluous, nothing idle. Having mentioned the elements that were brought forth together, it goes into no further detail in mentioning the rest but simply says, "Heaven and earth and all

15. Gn 2.1. Chrysostom, like the LXX translators before him, is not distracted from the unity of the account by the medieval division of the material into chapters.

their array were completed," referring by this means to everything on earth and in heaven.

(15) The earth's array, you see, is what is produced from it, the growth of plants, (88c) the harvest of fruits, the fruits of the trees, and all other things with which the Creator arrayed it; likewise the heaven's array is sun, moon, the variety of the stars, and everything else created in its midst. Hence, Sacred Scripture in mentioning heaven and earth included the whole of creation under those elements. "God completed on the sixth day," the text says, "the works he had done."¹⁶ Notice how it says the same thing twice over so that we might learn all the works of creation were done up to the sixth day. The text says, remember, "He completed on the sixth day the works he had done, and on the seventh day he rested from all the works he had done."

(16) What is the meaning of that verse, "On the seventh day he rested from all the works he had done"? Notice how Sacred Scripture narrates everything in human fashion even out of considerateness to us. (88d) I mean, it would not have been possible for us in any other way to understand anything of what was said had not such considerateness been thought fitting. The text says, remember, "On the seventh day God rested from all the works he had done." It says he stopped creating and bringing from non-being into being; he had produced everything he had to, after all, and had created the being destined to enjoy it. "God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it for the reason that on that day he rested from all the works God had begun to do."¹⁷ You see, when he stopped creating, he had out of his own loving kindness brought forth at his own command everything he had intended, and had brought creation to a close on the sixth day; there was nothing else he intended to produce on the seventh day for the reason that everything he intended had been fulfilled.

(17) Hence, in order that this day too might have some dis-

16. Gn 2.2. The Heb., in fact, strangely reads "seventh" here; but later versions, including the LXX, regarded it as an error.

17. Gn 2.3.

tion and not seem to bear some inferiority (89a) through the fact that nothing was created then, he conferred a blessing on it. "God blessed the seventh day," the text says, "and sanctified it." So what does that mean—the rest were not blessed? Of course they were, the text says, but for them it was enough, instead of any blessing, to have created things brought forth each time; hence, whereas in their case it did not say, "He blessed them," in the case of the seventh alone it did say so and added, "and sanctified it." What is the meaning of "He sanctified it"? He set it apart. Then, to teach us the reason for saying "He sanctified it," Sacred Scripture added, "for the reason that on that day he rested from all the works God had begun to do." Already at this point from the outset God provides us with instruction in a cryptic manner, teaching us that he set aside (89b) the whole of one day in the cycle of the week and marked it off for the performance of spiritual works.

(18) In other words, this is the reason why the Lord, after completing all the works of creation in six days, bestowed blessing on the seventh and consecrated it—for the reason of his resting on that day from his works which he had begun to do. But once again at this stage I detect a mighty swell of ideas overwhelming you, and I have no wish to pass them by thoughtlessly. Instead, I want to make you too sharers in these spiritual riches. What, then, is the question that arises for us at this point? While Sacred Scripture in this passage says that God rested from his works, in the Gospels Christ says, "My father is at work up until now and I am at work."¹⁸ Does there not seem from the sequence of the expressions to be some contradiction in what is said? Perish the thought: there is nothing contradictory (89c) in the contents of Sacred Scripture. You see, in saying at this point that God rested from his works, Scripture teaches us that he ceased creating and bringing from non-being into being on the seventh day, whereas Christ, in saying that "my father is at work up until now and I am at work," reveals his unceasing care for us: he calls "work"

¹⁸ Jn 5.17.

the maintenance of created things, bestowal of permanence on them, and governance of them through all time. If this wasn't so, after all, how would everything have subsisted, without the guiding hand above directing all visible things and the human race as well? If anyone in a spirit of great gratitude has a mind to survey everything, detail by detail, done for our benefit each day by the Creator of all things, you would find an abyss of loving kindness. (89d) I mean, what reasoning or what imagination would arrive at the unspeakable goodness which he displays for the race of human beings, making the sun rise on the evil and the good, sending rain upon just and unjust,¹⁹ and bestowing every other kind of good?

(19) Perhaps we have prolonged the sermon more than is necessary; this has not been done idly or to no purpose but (so that) those absent may learn through you how much loss they have incurred by depriving themselves of spiritual teaching on account of bodily nourishment. Lest, however, their despondency be aggravated, demonstrate your fraternal benevolence in their regard by conveying to them what has been said by us; this will, after all, be a sign of your genuine love. I mean, if people who do this in the case of material food (90a) by keeping tidbits from the table for their friends thus display a great sign of love, how much more does this behavior in the case of spiritual things win us great commendation, resulting as it does, after all, in our benefit as well. You see, the man who shows concern for teaching his neighbor does not so much do him a favor as reap a reward for himself; he gains a double benefit, enjoying a greater reward at God's hands and also, through the teaching he endeavors to give his brother, being reminded of it himself and renewing in his own mind the memory of what was said in the sermon. Accordingly, with an eye to your own profit, don't begrudge your brethren; instead, in this case let them learn from you what has been told you by us. But in case they come to rely on your charity in future to be taught these things, lead them to us and persuade them that partaking of bodily nourishment is no obstacle to

19. Cf. Mt 5:45.

spiritual teaching; (90b) on the contrary, any time must be considered suitable for discourse on spiritual topics.

(20) If we have a precise realization of this, we will be able while relaxing at home, both before eating and after eating, to take the Scriptures in our hands and gain benefit from them and provide spiritual nourishment for our soul.²⁰ You see, as the body has need of material nourishment, likewise, too, the soul needs daily reminders and spiritual nourishment so that it may be strengthened and thus able to resist the rebellion of the flesh and the constant battle waged within us to reduce our soul to servitude if we are disposed to drop our guard even for a short space of time. Hence the inspired author David called that person blessed who gave time to the law of the Lord day and night,²¹ and blessed Moses (90c) in his instruction of the Jewish people taught them in these words: "When you have eaten and drunk, and taken your fill, give your mind to the Lord your God."²² Do you see how it is especially appropriate after the enjoyment of food to set a spiritual meal for yourself lest the soul, after satiety of bodily food, should lose its zest and fall into some disaster and make way for the wiles of the devil, who is always looking for an opportunity and anxious to deliver us a blow at the critical moment? Again, in another place this same author said: "Whether sleeping or rising be mindful of the Lord your God."²³ Do you see how it never becomes us to drive this awareness from our soul, but rather to have it engraven on our conscience; we should be constantly on the alert and never allow ourselves respite, but rather remain sober and watchful in the knowledge of the fury of the one bearing hostility against us; we should repel his attacks (90d) and never neglect our spiritual nourishment. This, after all, is the secret of our salvation, our spiritual riches, our security. If we defend ourselves in this way day

20. Whatever the level of sophistication of Chrysostom's congregation, he has high expectations of their religious spirit and the temper of the "domestic Church," as we have noted above at Homily 6, note 18 in reference to Bible study groups. See also Introduction 11.

21. Ps 1.2.

22. A paraphrase of Dt 8.10-14.


23. Cf. Dt 6.7.

by day, through reading, through listening, through spiritual discourse,²⁴ we will be able to keep ourselves unharmed and render the devil's wiles ineffectual, and thus have the good fortune to reach the kingdom of heaven, thanks to the grace and loving kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, power and honor, now and forever, for ages of ages. Amen.

24. This, in a nutshell, is Chrysostom's formulation of the ways in which the Spirit touches the Christian—"through reading, through listening, through spiritual discourse."

HOMILY 11

On the theme that it is necessary to place great store by virtue and to imitate the saints, who while being of the same nature as ourselves live up to its precise obligations; and that sloth on our part will have no excuse.

 AM AWARE THAT in these past days I have challenged your thinking with some quite profound notions, (91a) hence today I intend to put to you a simpler instruction. You see, just as the body wasted by fasting needs a slight respite so that once more to the same degree it may gird itself for the rigors of fasting at the prompting of a renewed enthusiasm, so too the soul needs to stop and rest. After all, you can't always be straining or always resting; instead, you must do one at this time, the other at that time, and in this fashion regulate the condition of the soul and the impulses of the body. I mean, just as unremitting tension leads to wearing out through effort and to collapse, so, too, constant resting brings on sloth. You could see this happening in the case both of the soul and of the body. Accordingly, moderation in all things is excellent.¹

(2) This very thing the God of all teaches us, even through the very creatures he produced for our sustenance. (91b) To help you grasp this, let us take the example of the day and the night—I mean light and darkness. You see, when he determined the day for the labor of the human race, on the one hand, and, on the other, the dark of night for their rest and pause from toil, he set measures and limits to each, with the result that we all enjoy the benefit from this arrangement. As

1. A lesson learnt by bitter experience in Chrysostom's case, as we have seen (cf. Homily 10, note 6).

proof that the light is, after all, the appropriate time for the day's labor, listen to David's words: "People will go off to their work and their labor until evening."² He well said "until evening," since with the onset of evening light disappears: darkness falls to put the human race to sleep, gives rest to the weary body and repose to all its senses, and, just like an excellent nurse, refreshes all the faculties (91c) from labor and effort by the care it provides. But when the period of night is completed, the arrival of the sun takes effect and awakens us: it provides our refreshed senses with an encounter with the sun's rays and leads us to embrace our customary employment with fresh and vital enthusiasm.

(3) You can see this happening also in the seasons of the year: spring takes over from winter, and in the same way autumn succeeds the passing of summer, so that our bodies may find relief with the alternation of the mingling of the air, without, on the one hand, perishing through being frozen with ice beyond the normal, or, on the other hand, melting with excessive heat under the ferocity of summer. Accordingly, he ensures that we are adjusted to winter by the coming of autumn, and to summer by spring.

(4) And if you had a mind to survey everything else with a right mind, you would find (91d) in all created things a certain order and reason, nothing being done idly or to no purpose. Likewise in the case of the plants springing from the earth you would notice it: the earth doesn't produce them all at once, nor is the one time suited to tending the plants growing from it; instead, the farmer knows the appropriate time, having learnt it from God's evident design, and he realizes when he must sow the seed, when plant the trees and the vine in the earth's bosom, when sharpen the sickle for harvesting, when pick the fruit of the vine and cut the bunches of grapes, and at what time pick the fruit of the olive trees. (92a) And if you wanted to study everything in detail, you would find great wisdom also in people tilling the soil. And this can be seen not only on land but also at sea, where it is in fact possible to ob-

2. Ps 104.23.

serve in turn a remarkable wisdom of another kind: the pilot knows when he must launch the ship, sail it out of harbor, and cross the sea. Most of all in these men of the sea you can observe the great understanding which the wisdom of God conferred on the human race: people travelling the highways have no such precise knowledge of directions as these sailors who make their way safely on the waters. Hence Scripture too is amazed at God's surpassing wisdom and says of him, "The one who provides a path in the sea and a way through the raging billows."³ What human reasoning is able to achieve this level of perception? (92b) Likewise in the matter of consumption of human food you would find things arranged on the same pattern: the Lord regales us with different food according to each time and each season of the year; and like a perfect nurse the earth presents us with these things from herself, in obedience to the Creator's command.

(5) Lest, however, I prolong this point further, you can summarize all the rest for yourself in your good sense. Scripture says, remember, "Give wise people but an opportunity, and they will become wiser."⁴ I mean, this point can be seen not only in the matter of our food but also in regard to that of the brute beasts. And you could, if you wanted, from a study of many other things learn the unspeakable wisdom of God the master craftsman, and his surpassing goodness, and how by a definite design he produced each thing created. (92c) Accordingly, at this holy season of Lent, too, you will find the very same design now made for us. I mean, just as on the highways there are stopping places and lodgings, enabling travellers to rest from their weariness, recover from their distress and thus resume their journey, at sea, too, there are coasts and shores and harbors, enabling there also the seafarers to find a little respite after running before great billows and taking the brunt of the gales and thus resume their voyage. Now too in just the same way, at the holy season of Lent, those who have undertaken the course of fasting are granted by the Lord a short rest of these two days in the week, like

3. Wis 14:3.

4. Prv 9:9.

resting places and lodgings, or coasts and shores and harbors, so that we should rest the body a little from the rigors of fasting and comfort the soul, (92d) and once more after the passage of these two days resume the same way with enthusiasm, making a journey that is pleasant and advantageous.⁵

(6) So come now, since today is a day of rest, let us too encourage you, dearly beloved, to protect carefully the gains you have made from fasting, so that after resting a little you may add further to your earlier gains and thus little by little store up for yourselves great resources; in this way you will present yourselves at the day of the Lord and bring safely to the harbor of the holy festival your rich spiritual cargo. You see, just as everything created by the Lord has been created by a certain design (as the Word reveals and the proof of experience teaches us) and fulfils a necessary purpose, so too it is proper that what is done by us not be done idly or to no purpose but for the benefit and (93a) advantage of our salvation.

(7) After all, if people engaged in secular affairs never risk beginning an enterprise without first giving careful thought to the gain likely to accrue from it, much more is it proper for us to follow that procedure, not passing heedlessly by the days of fasting, but examining our conscience, scrutinizing our thinking, and considering what we have done right on this day and what on that day, what interest we have acquired for the future, and how much improvement we have achieved in our passions. You see, if we were unlikely to manage our affairs in this way and take this kind of care of our soul, there would be no advantage to us from the fasting and abstinence we undergo, especially if we suffer by comparison with people showing so much zeal for making money. (93b) I mean, each of them you would find letting no single day pass without adding something to what they already possess and never reaching satiety; instead, the more their possessions grow, so much the more is their zeal and enthusiasm heightened. So, if

5. Evidently in the church of Antioch (as generally in the ancient East, Chrysostom's editors note) the Lenten fast was relaxed on two days of the week. Perhaps the fact that this sermon was delivered on one such day accounts for its complete departure from the Gn text.

in the case where zeal is fruitless and concern for possessions often causes great harm to the salvation of our soul there is evidence of so much attention, how much more ought we not exert ourselves where great advantage stems from zeal, the gain beyond telling, and the yield infinite? In the former case, after all, great uncertainty accompanies all those gains, money-making being a risky business, not simply because at the moment of death whatever remains here below brings no advantage to the one amassing it, but also because, while the money remains here, (93c) one must go to face a very rigid accounting for it. It also frequently happens that even before death, despite all those efforts and struggles and difficulties, which dealing in money brings upon one like a storm, the person possessing great wealth of possessions suddenly becomes poorer than the poorest of the poor. This you can see happening daily, whereas in the matter of spiritual resources there is never anything like that to be feared: they are certain and free of risk, and the more we gain of them, the greater the reason for confidence we are given by them.

(8) I beg you, therefore, while we have time, let us bring zeal to the task of gaining spiritual resources, at least equal to that of those other people, (93d) and let us never cease giving our attention to that task, by doing some good deed, or by putting to flight through great vigilance some troublesome passion, so that we may have the security of a good conscience and enjoy the immense satisfaction which that brings. After all, we must not seek simply to be present here day after day, listen continually to the same matters and go fasting for the whole of Lent. I mean, if we were unlikely to gain anything from regular attendance here and the daily instruction,⁶ and to carry off something useful for the soul from the period of fasting, this would not simply be of no benefit to us but would

6. It seems from such remarks that Chrysostom's congregation attended these Homilies daily (with two exceptions, cf. nt. 5) during Lent, perhaps before Lent, and (to judge from Homily 33) well after Lent. They seem to function separately from the Eucharist, and just as well: the homilies are not brief, and they tend to get lengthier as Chrysostom goes on. See Introduction 8,11.

prove an occasion of heavier condemnation for remaining the same though enjoying such care and attention: the angry person not becoming meek and mild, the ill-tempered not changed into someone gentle, (94a) the envious not making themselves well-disposed, the miser not rescued from that passion to turn towards almsgiving and the relief of the poor, the unbridled not becoming temperate, the seeker after empty glory not learning to despise it and look for true glory, nor the one slow to love the neighbor undergoing a change of heart so as to learn not simply to be no worse than the tax collectors ("If you love those who love you," Scripture says, remember, "what improvement are you making? Don't even the tax collectors do that?"⁷) but to correct one's thinking, look kindly on one's enemies and show much love for them.

(9) If we don't get the better of those passions and the others rising within us while attending here daily, enjoying constant instructions, (94b) taking advantage of such teaching and getting help from fasting, what excuse is there for us? What defense can we make? After all, tell me, I beg you: if you saw your child going each day to school and gaining nothing from it in all that period of time, surely you wouldn't take that lying down? Wouldn't you take the rod to the child and blame the teacher as well? If you then learnt that everything had been done by the teacher for his part and nothing omitted, whereas the child's sloth was established as the cause of everything, wouldn't you transfer all your displeasure to the child and acquit the teacher of any guilt? Well, that's exactly what is the situation here: by an arrangement, as it were, of God's grace, we summon you daily like spiritual children to this school (94c) and present to you salutary teaching. We preach not the things that come from our own mind but the teachings vouchsafed us by the Lord through the Holy Scriptures, proclaiming them publicly and making them resound constantly. So if, despite our display of utter zeal and vigilance, and our conduct of you each day along the way of vir-

7. A collation of Mt 5:46-47, either from Chrysostom's own NT text or for making his point more directly.

tue, you persist in the same faults, think how great our shame will be and your condemnation, not to put too fine a point on it. You see, even if we are proved guiltless on the score of neglecting nothing to do with your edification, yet because we are concerned for your salvation we cannot accept this situation unfeelingly. The teacher, too, when he notices his student reaping no benefit from all his efforts, not infrequently laments and regrets it (94d) to see his labors gone for nought.

(10) I am saying this now, not to grieve you, dearly beloved, but to awaken you and put you on the alert so that it won't be all to no purpose that you torment the body with fasting, or fruitlessly and in vain that you pass the days of the holy season of Lent. Why mention the days of Lent when, to be sure, we ought not let slip by one single day in the whole of our life, if at all possible, without storing up for ourselves spiritual gain, either through prayer, or confession, or almsgiving, or some other spiritual practice? I mean, if a man of such quality and stature as Paul, who heard those ineffable words which no one to this day has knowledge of, cried out at the top of his voice, "Daily I die—yes, for the pride I take in you,"⁸ to teach us that he kept exposing himself to danger for that good cause in such a way as (95a) to come close to death each day, and that what nature could not sustain (all of us, after all, being liable to death without exception) his utter singleness of purpose achieved for him, especially as the loving God further kept a watchful eye on him for the salvation of others—if, then, that man, distinguished for such feats, with the appearance of an angel on earth, as it were, daily exerted himself to achieve some gain, to take issue with the dangers of fighting for the truth, and to amass for himself spiritual resources without letting up, what excuse would we have to offer for not simply being strangers to right-doing but also being subject to deficiencies of such a kind that one alone would suffice to cast us into the very depths of ruin, and for showing no zeal at all, at least for setting all this to rights? But when the same person is frequently discovered guilty not simply of one weakness (95b)

8. 1 Cor 15:31.

but many, being ill-tempered, or intemperate, or greedy, or envious, or hot-headed, with no intention of reforming or of turning to deeds of virtue, what hope of salvation is there in the final analysis?

(11) I say this to you, and will not cease telling you, so that each of my listeners may adopt the appropriate remedy from what I have been saying, may quickly become anxious to be cured of those troublesome passions and return to health, as well as to render themselves accustomed to the practice of virtue. To draw a comparison with people suffering bodily ailments: if the patient were reluctant, despite the doctor's administering the drugs innumerable times, to let the healing power of the drugs take effect but instead often proved to be unco-operative after the doctor's attentions, showed no capacity for pain, rejected the treatment and got no benefit from it, no right-minded person would blame the doctor, (95c) who had done everything possible. Well, in exactly the same way in our case, too, have we for our part taken pains to administer the medicine coming from spiritual teaching, while your response has evidently been to put up with the distress, to benefit from the treatment, to be cured of the disease and return to true health. In this way, you know, you will gain a keen awareness of your own well-being, while we get no little boost to our confidence, seeing how people formerly ill have returned so rapidly to good health.

(12) So, I beg you, let each of you show interest now at least, even if not in the past, to excise from the soul whatever blemish you have perceived to be troubling you more than other passions, and by recourse to pious thinking as though by some spiritual sword rid yourself of that passion. God, you see, has given us the power of thinking that is adequate and capable, if we were prepared (95d) to ponder a little, of subduing each of the passions rising within us. For this reason the grace of the Spirit has left written for us in the pages of the sacred writings the lives and conduct of all holy people so that we might learn all the deeds of virtue they performed, people of the same nature as ourselves, and that we might not be lazy in the practice of virtue. Was not blessed Paul of the same

nature as ourselves? I mean, for this man I have an intense regard, and hence I do not cease bringing him constantly to mind;⁹ fixing my eyes on his soul as though on some exemplary model, I marvel at his control of passion, the eminence of his manly spirit, the ardor of his love for God; and the realization comes to me that one man set his mind on achieving in his person all that multitude of virtues, whereas each of us perhaps hasn't even the inclination, let alone the achievement. So who (96a) will snatch us from inescapable punishment in view of the fact that someone sharing our nature, subject to the same passions and beset with such periods of difficulty—daily man-handled, so to say, tortured and swept off by public consent at the hands of opponents of his preaching, people who often thought him to be dead and thus eventually, as though translating thought into action, left him for dead—which of us will be found to give evidence of such a degree of virtue, being, as we are, so full of faults and to such an extent victims of such indifference?

(13) In case, however, you hear only from my lips the achievements of this blessed man and his manly spirit which he daily demonstrated in the cause of his preaching about religion, you ought to listen to his own words. (96b) You remember when he felt compelled, on account of the deceit of the false 'apostles,' to give an account of himself; it was so worrying and repulsive a thing for him that he shrank back and had no wish to publicize these details—in fact, he was even led to refer to himself as a blasphemer and a persecutor. Since, however, he recognized the great need, for the sake of stopping the mouths of the imposters, to give some little encouragement to his disciples, he took the following line after saying many other things: "Whatever anyone else was bold enough to do—I'm stupid to say so—I was bold enough,

9. How true this is, the text of almost every homily makes clear. Biographers of Chrysostom could easily relate the fellow-feeling Chrysostom had for Paul to a mutual impatience with half measures and (eventually) an experience of the afflictions that apostleship brings. A glance at the Scriptural quotations in this volume will reveal Chrysostom's fondness for quoting the Pauline letters, matched only by Matthew's Gospel and the Psalms. See Introduction 18.

too.”¹⁰ Do you notice the attitude of this religious man, how he refers to that action not simply as boldness but as stupidity, thus teaching us never to parade what we’ve done idly and without need, if no one is pressing us—should there by chance be any of us found responsible for some good deed. “Whatever anyone else was bold enough to do—I’m stupid to say so—I was bold enough, too”—that is to say, when I see a case of great need, (96c) I have it in mind to be bold and to be guilty of an instance of stupidity. “They are Hebrews? so am I; they are Israelites? so am I; they are the seed of Abraham? so am I.”¹¹ On the basis of these claims, he says, they have a great opinion of themselves; let them not think we lag behind, being after all party to the same claims ourselves. Then he added, “They are ministers of Christ? (I speak like a fool) I am more than that.”¹²

(14) See in this case, I ask you, dearly beloved, the virtue of this blessed man’s soul: since he called what was done by him boldness and stupidity as well, despite his being forced into the need to do it, he did not stop short at the above words. Instead, since he was on the point of showing that he surpassed those people by a great margin lest anyone think he was saying all this out of conceit, he once more calls what was done by him stupidity, as though to say: It is not lost on me (96d) that the thing I’m doing gives offense to many people, and that doesn’t become me; but extreme need forces me into doing it—so forgive me (he says) the words of folly I’m speaking. Let us measure up even to a shadow of this great man, carrying as we do such a load of sins to weigh us down. Often, if we manage to achieve some tiny good deed, we prove incapable of keeping it in the recesses of our mind, but from a desire to chase after people’s good opinion we strut about and parade it before them, depriving ourselves of the reward due from God all because of this untimely vanity. This blessed man, on the contrary, wasn’t guilty of anything of that sort. What was true in his case? He said, “They are ministers of

10. 2 Cor 11.21.

11. Ib.22.

12. Ib.23.

Christ? (I speak like a fool) I am more than that;" then and only then he brings forward the achievements to which the false 'apostles' had nothing to show in response. How could they, being, as they were, opponents of the truth, (97a) guilty of everything possible to impede the preaching of religion, and upsetting the minds of those settled in the faith?

(15) So, after saying, "I am more than that," he falls to enumerating the achievements of his manly spirit, and says: "In difficulties to an extraordinary degree, under blows beyond measure, facing death not infrequently." What is this you say? Remarkable and beyond belief is what you have to say. I mean, can you face death more than once? Yes, he says, even if it is not so much actual experience as in the mind—to teach us that he exposed himself unceasingly to such dangers threatening him with death on account of his preaching, but the grace of God protected the athlete in the very midst of these dangers so that great benefit came to his disciples from him. "Facing death not infrequently," he says; "at the hands of Jews I five times received forty lashes bar one, thrice was I scourged with rods, once stoned, (97b) thrice was I shipwrecked, I spent a day and a night in the depths of the sea, in journeyings often, at risk from rivers, at risk from brigands, at risk from fellow Jews, at risk from pagans, at risk from false brethren, at risk in cities, at risk in the wide open spaces, at risk at sea."¹³ Let us not, dearly beloved, pass these words by heedlessly: each of them taken singly gives us a clue to a vast ocean of experiences. I mean, he didn't just casually say one journeying but "In journeyings often," not a single risk from rivers "many different risks"—and all he endured with great bravery. After all this he goes on to say: "Suffering trials and tribulations, sleepless nights more often than not, hunger and thirst, frequent lack of food, cold and nakedness, not to mention other problems."¹⁴

(16) Notice further another vast ocean of difficulties opened

13. Ib.25–26, with a logical rearrangement of our accepted NT text, promoting false brethren in the order.

14. Ib.27–28.

up to us. In saying, "Not to mention other problems," he hinted that those (97c) omitted were probably more numerous than those mentioned. Nor did he stop at that: instead, he goes on to teach us the troubles and disturbances he endured when he says, "What brought me trouble every day—the care of all the churches."¹⁵ Notice as well this further achievement sufficient of itself, had it happened to be his only achievement, to lead him to the very pinnacle of virtue: "the care of all the churches," not one, or two, or three, but all the churches throughout the world. In other words, whatever parts of the earth the sun traverses in spreading its rays, this blessed man had that as his care and responsibility. See his breadth of soul? see his greatness of mind? Moreover, all this is implied by that phrase he takes as read, as you might say; he simply goes on, "Who suffers weakness without my suffering it too? Who is scandalized without my being inflamed too?"¹⁶ Goodness me, what loving concern this man shows! (97d) how much sleepless anxiety, how much care! What mother endures as much anguish when her child is plagued with fever, lying on a bed of pain, as this blessed man suffered in greater degree for those suffering weakness in whatever place, and was upset about those being scandalized? I mean, consider, if you would, the significance of the expression. He did not say, Who is scandalized without my being sorry too, but, my being inflamed, suggesting to us the intensity of the pain, as though revealing himself set alight by that incident and burning over the thought of those people enduring scandal.

(17) I know I have prolonged the instruction to great length, despite my promise to be brief today so that you might get a little respite from the rigors of fasting. But somehow when I come face to face with the wealth of achievement of this holy man, I lose control of my tongue as though swept away by an irresistible flood. (98a) So, I'll finish the sermon at this point, and urge you, my dear people, to be constantly mindful of this

15. In quoting Paul on his "trouble," Chrysostom is reading *epistustasis* for the *epistasis* of our accepted text.

16. Ib.29.

man and consider unremittingly that, while sharing the same nature as ourselves, subject to the same passions, practicing the lowly and poorly paid trade of tentmaker, turning up to work out of an intention and desire to devote himself to the labors virtue involves and make himself worthy to entertain the Holy Spirit, he enjoyed to a remarkable degree favor from on high. We therefore will meet no obstacle to the enjoyment of these same rewards provided we resolve to demonstrate these qualities ourselves. The Lord, after all, is generous, and “wishes all people to be saved and come to knowledge of truth.”¹⁷ So let us render ourselves worthy, (98b) and with lively enthusiasm set our sights on virtue if only at this late stage; let us give evidence of disciplining the passions within us, and so render ourselves suited for receiving the gift of the Spirit. May it be the good fortune of us all to be judged worthy of this gift, thanks to the grace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, power and honor, now and forever, for ages of ages. Amen.

17. 1 Tm 2.4.

HOMILY 12

On the sequel to creation: "This is the book about the origins of heaven and earth when they were created, on the day God made heaven and earth."¹



OME NOW, TODAY let us fulfil our promise and move on to the accustomed instruction, connecting what we are about to say with the thread of the sermons given so far. (98c) You remember, of course, that when we were all set on one or two occasions and quite intent on following that course, concern for our brethren changed the direction of our speech towards encouragement of them. You see, sometimes those of the brethren who are ailing, who habitually absent themselves from this spiritual gathering, and who spoil the joy coming to them from this holy festival, we persuade by much encouragement and advice not to cut themselves off for long from Christ's flock nor be misled beyond this spiritual fold by, on the one hand, associating with us in word and name while, on the other hand, following in fact the Jews, those seated in darkness and attracted to a lantern despite the illumination of the sun of justice.² (98d) At other times we have urged the uninitiated members of this congregation³ to respond to their spiritual calling by shaking off all drowsiness and all sloth, calling on a lively desire and heightened enthusi-

1. Gn 2.4.

2. Chrysostom has often been charged with anti-semitism, and he does warn his congregation against Jewish positions. His biographers defend him by highlighting the influence held in Antioch by Jews at the time. Doubtless also his regard for Paul would encourage him to comparisons of this type deriving from 2 Cor 3.

3. The catechumens, preparing during Lent for baptism, are thus warned against *rhuthumia*, "indifference."

asm to make themselves ready for receiving the royal gift and to long for the one bringing them the gift of forgiveness of their sins and providing them with countless good things in abundance.

(2) So, now that we have displayed the care that becomes us in regard to those who are mistaken about the feast of Easter, and who bring great harm to themselves by the little attention they think it deserves, and now that we have applied an appropriate remedy to their wound and have delivered the due admonition to the uninitiated, it would be in order at long last to spread before all of you alike, today, the spiritual banquet, since we have taken issue with the most urgent of the ailments and have dealt adequately with them. You can appreciate the comparison: if before (99a) attending to our brethren we had continued on from where we left off, forsaking the task of encouraging them and overlooking their difficulties, in all likelihood someone would have reproached us for passing up an opportunity; so, as things are now, since nothing has been omitted that lay within our power but on the contrary we have delivered words of instruction, we have gone to some expense, we have sown the seed in this spiritual soil, it is in order once again to open up for your consideration the reading from blessed Moses so that you may reap some benefit from it and thus make your way home. So, to find out what it is, let us listen carefully.

(3) The text says: "This is the book about the origins of heaven and earth when they were created, on the day God made heaven and earth, before any grass of the field appeared on the earth or any crop of the field sprouted. (99b) God, you see, had not sent rain on the earth, and there was no human being to till the soil; a spring used to flow out of the ground and water the whole face of the earth."⁴ Notice again, I ask you, the insight of this remarkable author, or rather the teaching of the Holy Spirit. I mean, after narrating to us detail by detail all the items of creation and going through the

4. Gn 2.4-6.

works of the six days, the creation of human beings and the authority granted them over all visible things, now he sums them all up in the words, "This is the book about the origins of heaven and earth when they were created." It is worth enquiring at this point why it is he calls it the book of heaven and earth in view of the fact that the book contains many other things and teaches us about a greater number of matters—about the virtue of good people, about God's loving kindness and the consideration he demonstrated in regard both (99c) to the first-formed human being and to the whole human race, and about a lot of other things it would be impossible to list right now. Don't be surprised, dearly beloved; after all, it is the custom with Holy Scripture not to describe everything to us in detail in every case but rather to begin with a summary of related items and to leave further detail to be considered by right-minded listeners as they take in what is said.

(4) So that you may learn this is the case, I will make it clear from the very verses just now read. What I refer to is this: notice Sacred Scripture taught us in detail in the preceding verses the creation of everything, but now, instead of mentioning them all, it says: "This is the book about the origins of heaven and earth when they were created, on the day God made heaven and earth," and so on. Do you see how it confines the whole account to heaven and earth, leaving us to get from them a sweeping view of all the other things? (99d) I mean, when it said heaven and earth, it included everything together in those words, both things on earth and things in heaven. So, just as in its account of created things it doesn't mention them all one by one but gives a summary of related items and makes no further attempt to describe them to us, so too it called the whole book the book about the origins of heaven and earth, even though it contains many other things, evidently leaving us to work out from the reference to these two that all visible things are of necessity contained in this book, both those in heaven and those on earth.

(5) "On the day God made heaven and earth," the text goes on, "before any grass of the field appeared on the earth or any crop of the field sprouted, since God, you see, had not

sent rain on the earth, and there was no human being to till the soil; a spring (100a) used to flow out of the ground and water the whole face of the earth." Great is the treasure concealed in these brief words—hence the need for us to unfold the meaning of the text with great sagacity, under the guidance of God's grace, and to lead you to share in this spiritual wealth. The Holy Spirit, after all, in his foreknowledge of future events wishes to prevent anyone's being able to engage in controversy later on, and in opposition to Sacred Scripture to set notions from their own reasoning against the dogmas of the Church; so now again, after teaching us the order of created things—what was created first and what second—and the fact that from the earth in compliance with the Lord's word and direction the earth produced plants and was stirred into pangs of fertility, without depending on the sun for assistance (how could it, after all, the sun not yet being created?) nor on the moisture from showers, nor on human labor (100b) (human beings, after all, not having been brought forth), accordingly once again he makes mention of all the items one by one so as to stop the unbridled tongue of people spoiling to make a show of their shamelessness.⁵

(6) What in fact does he say? "On the day God made heaven and earth before any grass of the field appeared on the earth or any crop of the field sprouted. God, you see, had not sent rain on the earth, and there was no human being to till the soil; a spring used to flow out of the ground and water the whole face of the earth." He intends to convey the fact that by his word and direction things not existing previously were brought into existence, and what had not been, came into

5. Comment has already been made on Chrysostom's relatively uncritical style of commentary (see Introduction 16); and, all things considered, we are not surprised that he is in some difficulty at this point accounting for a second creation narrative, not having the advantage of a later age's source criticism. His task is made the more difficult by the apparent rationalizing of the two accounts by the LXX version, which has evidently ignored the change of name of God to Yahweh in the Hebrew and a further significant alteration of order from creation of "heaven and earth" (1.1) to making of "earth and heaven" (2.4b)—items that receive much notice in modern commentaries on the Heb. text as evidence of different narrative strands.

view all of a sudden. "Crop" means what springs from the soil: when it says "crop" it means plants of all kinds. And in teaching us about showers, again Sacred Scripture added, "God, you see, had not sent rain on the earth"—that is to say, no showers had so far been sent from on high. (100c) And after this it finally shows us that there was no dependence on human labor either: "There was no human being," it says, remember, "to till the soil"—as if to shout aloud and tell everyone coming later: Listen to this and learn how everything springing from the earth was produced, and don't think it was all due to the care of people working the soil, nor attribute its birth pangs of fertility to them but to the word and direction given it from the beginning by the Creator. All this happens that you may learn that there was no dependence on the assistance of the other elements for the growth of its plants; instead, what was required was the direction of the Creator.

(7) What is really remarkable and surprising is that the one who now by his own word awakens the earth to germination of so many plants and demonstrates his own power surpassing human reasoning, this same earth, heavy as it is (100d) and supporting such a huge universe on its back, he rested on the waters as foundation, as the inspired author says, "He who rests the earth on the waters as foundation."⁶ What human reasoning could arrive at this design? I mean, when people build their houses and have in mind to sink foundations, they first dig a hole: if on reaching some depth they see a trace of dampness, they take every step to remove it all and only then sink the foundations. By comparison with this the Creator of all creates everything in a way contrary to humankind so that you may learn even from this his ineffable power and the fact that, when he wishes, the very elements can be seen to perform in a way contrary to their own abilities in compliance with the Creator's wishes.

(8) To make this subject clearer to you (101a) let us make you familiar with the preceding point and then pass on to the

6. Ps 136.6, in Chrysostom's individual text that reinforces his point better than Heb. or LXX.

next. You see, it is contrary to the nature of the waters to carry a heavy body in this way; and, again, it is foreign to the earth to take its position on such a foundation. Why do you marvel at this? After all, if you take it into your head to study each created thing, you will encounter the infinite power of the Creator and the fact that by his own will he governs all visible things. This, in fact, can be seen happening also in the case of fire: though it has the capacity to burn up, and it prevails over everything, consuming all material of stone, wood, iron and other bodies with ease, yet when the Creator so directed, it left untouched delicate and perishable bodies and, in fact, kept the children unharmed in the middle of the furnace.⁷ Don't be surprised if it left these bodies untouched and if, in fact, this irrational element demonstrated (101b) the kind of restraint that cannot be described. You see, it did not so much as harm their hair; instead, it formed a circle around them and kept them inside it; the substance of the fire, as it were, responded in obedience, and in compliance with the Lord's direction it kept those excellent children safe and sound, so that they moved about in the furnace with such ease as though strolling through a meadow or garden. And, lest anyone think that what they saw was not a fire at work, the loving Lord for that purpose did not hamper its efficacy; instead, he allowed its burning qualities to remain active, rendering his servants proof against its harmful effect but ensuring that those who thrust them in might learn the extent of the power of the Lord of all: the fire showed its force against them, burning and consuming them as they stood outside the furnace while at the same time encircling the children inside.

(9) Do you see how, whenever the Lord wishes, (101c) each of the elements changes its properties into the very opposite? The Lord, you see, is also Creator, and he governs everything according to his own will. Do you want to see this very thing happening also in the case of the waters? Well, just as in the present case the fire refrained from harming the people right inside it, on the one hand, neglecting to exercise its own

power, while, on the other hand, it exercised that power in the case of those who happened to be outside it, in like manner we will see the waters drowning some but giving way before others so that they crossed over in safety. Remember in this connection, I ask you, Pharaoh and the Egyptians, and the people of the Hebrews, how the latter by the Lord's command and under the leadership of the great Moses crossed the Red Sea in this way as though across dry land, whereas the Egyptians with Pharaoh wanted to go the same way as the Hebrews, (101d) but were submerged and drowned.⁸ Thus even the elements know how to respect the Lord's servants and to keep in check their own impulse.

(10) Let us hear an account of the number of times we have betrayed our own salvation through being hot-tempered, and angry, and a prey to the other passions through our indifference, and let us imitate the great obedience of these elements, irrational though they are, while we are endowed with the gift of reason. After all, if fire, which has such capacity to burn, which is so fierce, left untouched in that fashion delicate and perishable bodies, what allowance can be made for human beings not prepared to check their own rage despite the Lord's command and eliminate resentment against their neighbor? What is even worse is the fact that fire, while having this property—I mean, to burn—did not demonstrate this capacity, whereas the human being, a creature gentle, and rational, and mild, behaves in a manner contrary to its nature and through indifference (102a) casts itself in the mold of the wild beasts. Hence even Sacred Scripture, with these sorts of disturbing passions in mind, in many places applies the names of brutes and of wild beasts to those gifted with reason: sometimes it calls them dogs on account of their shameful and headstrong behavior—"Dumb dogs are they," it says, remember, "unable even to bark"⁹—at other times horses on account of their unbridled appetites—"They turned into rutting horses, each neighing after his neighbor's wife"¹⁰—at

8. Ex 14.

10. Jer 5.8.

9. Is 56.10.

other times asses for their folly and stupidity—"He has resembled the monsters that lack all intelligence," it says, remember, "and has become like them"¹¹—at other times lions and leopards on account of their greed and rapacity, at other times serpents because of their deceit—"Poison of serpents," it says, "on their lips"¹²—whereas at other times it called them snakes and vipers on account of their venom and malice, as blessed John cried aloud in these words: "Snakes, brood of vipers, who has shown you how to flee from the wrath to come?"¹³ (102b) And it adds other names appropriate to the various passions in the hope that eventually they may feel ashamed of this behavior and turn back to their true nobility, coming to terms with their true nature and giving the laws of God pride of place before their own passions to which through sloth they have given themselves up.

(11) But I don't know how I strayed from the thread of the sermon on to these matters. Come now, let us return at this late stage to the preceding point, and let us see what else this blessed author wants to teach us today. You see, after saying, "This is the book about the origins of heaven and earth," he presses on and describes further for us with great detail the creation of the human being. Since he had briefly said above, "God made the human being; in God's image he made them," he now says, "God shaped the human being from the dust of the earth, (102c) and breathed into him a breath of life; the human being became alive."¹⁴ A mighty saying, giving rise to great wonderment, and beyond the limits of human understanding: "God shaped the human being," it says, "taking dust from the earth." Just as in the case of all the visible creatures I kept saying that the Creator of all performs everything in a manner contrary to human nature so as to demonstrate his ineffable power through this as well, so too in the case of the formation of the human being we will find this taking place. I mean, notice how he rested the earth on the waters, some-

11. Ps 49.13 in the LXX version, substantially different from the Heb.

12. Ps 140.3.

13. Mt 3.7, embellished for effect.

14. Gn 2.7.

thing human reasoning does not without faith succeed in accepting, and that whenever he wishes he succeeds in converting the properties of all things to their opposite, as we have shown. Well, this very same thing Sacred Scripture now reveals to us happening in the case of the formation of the human being as well: "God shaped (102d) the human being," it says, "taking dust from the earth."

(12) What is that you say? Taking dust from the earth he shaped the human being? Yes, it says; it did not simply say "earth" but "dust," something more lowly and substantial even than earth, so to say. You think the saying amazing and incredible; but if you recall who is the creator in this case, you will no longer withhold faith in the event but marvel at the Creator's power and bow your knee to it. If, on the other hand, you chanced to put your mind to these matters in light of the limitations of your powers of reason, you would likely get this strange idea into your head, namely, that a body could never be made from earth—a brick or a pot, yes, but never could such a body be made. Do you see that unless we take into account the Creator's power and suppress our own reasoning which betrays such limitations, we will be unable to accept the sublimity of the message? After all, the words require the eyes of faith, spoken as they are (103a) with such great considerateness and with our limitations in mind. You see, that very remark, "God shaped the human being, and breathed," is properly inapplicable to God; yet because of us and our limitations Sacred Scripture expresses it in that way, showing considerateness to us, so that, having been thought worthy of the considerateness, we might be enabled to arrive at that sublime level of thought.¹⁵

(13) "God shaped the human being," it says, "taking dust from the earth." Finally, from these words spring no little instruction in humility, as long as we are prepared to be alert to

15. Anthropomorphisms in the scriptural text represent for Chrysostom an eminent example of considerateness, *synkatábasis*, in view of our limitations, *astheneia*—while, on the other hand, they must not be allowed to undermine that correlative notion of his, divine transcendence. They are given to us to elevate our thinking and heighten our reverence, not lower it.

it. I mean, whenever we consider where our nature derived the beginning of its subsistence, even if we put our brains to it thousands of times, we are humbled and chastened, and in our efforts to plumb our being we learn to respect proper limits. For this reason, God, caring for our salvation, thus directed the tongue of the sacred writer for our instruction. (103b) You see, when Sacred Scripture said in its previous statement, "God made the human being; in God's image he made them," he gave him complete control of visible things lest out of ignorance of the composition of his own being he might conjure up inflated notions of his own importance and transgress the limits proper to him.

(14) Hence, when Scripture comes back to the point it teaches us also the manner of our composition and the beginning of our creation, and whence the first human being was produced and how it was produced. After all, into what depths of madness would we not have tumbled if, despite this teaching and despite the knowledge that the human being takes the beginning of its composition from the earth as do the plants and the irrational beings (though its formation and the bodiless being of the soul has given it a marked superiority, thanks to God's loving kindness, (103c) this constituting after all the basis of its rationality and its endowment with control over all creation),—if then with this knowledge this creature shaped from the earth had conjured up the notion of its equality with God owing to the serpent's deceit, and if the blessed author had been content with his first account and had not repeated himself in teaching us everything with precision,¹⁶ into what depths of madness would we not have tumbled?

(15) The result is that we gain the greatest possible degree of instruction in philosophy from learning whence we derive the composition of our being from the very outset. "God shaped the human being," the text says, "taking dust from the earth, and breathed into him a breath of life." Since it was ex-

¹⁶ See note 5 above. To Chrysostom's mind, Moses gives a second creation account for that great scriptural virtue, "precision."

plaining to human beings who were unable to understand in any way other than we ourselves can understand, it employs this kind of concreteness of expression,¹⁷ and intends also to teach us that the Lord's loving kindness intended that this creature shaped from the earth (103d) should have also a rational being by reason of a soul, by means of which this living thing emerged complete and perfect. "He breathed into him a breath of life," the text says; the creature shaped from the earth, it means, was endowed with this breath as a vital force, and this became the origin of the soul's being. At any rate, the text added: "The human being became alive." That shaped thing, that creature from the dust, received the breathing of the breath of life, and "it became alive," the text says. What is the meaning of "became alive"? Enjoying vital force, having limbs to its body that respond to this vital force and obey its will.

(16) But I have no idea how we upset that arrangement, and how such an onset of evil occurred as to oblige it to follow the bidding of the flesh, (104a) so that what should in the manner of a queen have presided and exercised rule we have unseated from her throne and forced to obey the pleasures of the flesh, ignorant as we are of its nobility and the degree of pre-eminence it has the good fortune to be accorded. I mean, think of the order of its formation, I ask you, and consider what this shaped thing was before the Lord's breathing which meant a breath of life for it and resulted in its becoming alive. Simply a lifeless shell, without vital force, and useful for nothing, so that its total make-up and its succession to such great esteem all stems from that action of breathing made upon it by God. Lest you think this happened from things already created at that time instead of from something that happens each day at the present time, consider, I ask you, how after the departure of the soul this body appears odious and unpleasant? (104b) How repulsive, how much reeking with stench, how marked by complete deformity this creature

17. See Homily 9, note 1 above for comment on Chrysostom's thinking on the concreteness, *pachutēs*, of biblical language.

that previously when it had the soul to conduct it was bright, graceful, marked by beauty of form, abounding with intelligence, enjoying great aptitude for the performance of good deeds.

(17) So, with this in mind, and realizing the nobility of our soul, let us be guilty of no behavior unworthy of it nor defile it with unfitting actions, subjecting it to the thrall of the flesh and showing so little appreciation and regard for what is so noble and endowed with such pre-eminence. After all, because of the soul's being, we who are intertwined with a body can, if we wish (104c) and under the influence of God's grace, strive against disembodied powers, can walk on earth as though coursing across heaven, and pass our lives in this manner, suffering no inferiority. How that can be, I will tell you. You see, when people prove, despite entanglement with a mortal body, to live the same life as those supernal powers, how will they not be deemed worthy of grace from God for keeping untarnished the soul's nobility, though subject to the body's necessities.

(18) Who could possibly prove, someone says, to be of such character? Quite likely this thing is thought unlikely by us because of the extreme paucity of our virtue. But if you are prepared to learn that this is not out of the question, consider, I ask you, those who have been pleasing to the Lord from the beginning up to the present time (104d) the mighty John, son of infertility, citizen of the desert; Paul, the world's teacher; and the whole series of saints, who happened to have the same nature as ourselves, subject to the same necessities of the body—and no longer consider the thing to be impossible, nor be apathetic where virtue is concerned, but accept such opportunities as the Lord leaves for laying hold of virtue with ease. Our loving Lord, you see, knowing the weakness of our purpose and our tendency to fall, has left us great remedies in the reading of the Scriptures so that we might constantly apply them to ourselves and recall the lives of those great and wonderful men. Thus we may be led to imitation and not neglect virtue, but (105a) rather avoid evil and do everything so

as not to prove ourselves unworthy of those unspeakably good people. May this be the good fortune of all of us, thanks to the grace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, power and honor, now and forever, for ages of ages. Amen.

HOMILY 13

"The Lord God planted a garden in Eden in the east, and placed in it the human creature he had formed."¹



SEE YOUR INSATIABLE interest, your great enthusiasm and eager attention, and the way you are all coming to spiritual teaching expectant and impatient. On the other hand, I am conscious of my own great inadequacy. (105b) Still, I am anxious to lay before you this mean and paltry table frequently, and in fact daily, trusting that you will readily receive what is said, stimulated as you are with your own enthusiasm. One can see this happening in the case of material nourishment: whenever guests come to dinner with keen appetite, they eat with great relish whatever is placed before them, no matter if the meal happens to be paltry and the host ungenerous—whereas when the diners have indifferent appetite, no matter if the meal is sumptuous and the menu varied, it is wasted on them since they can't do justice to the good things provided. Here today, however, your enthusiasm has in fact been enlivened through God's grace and the repast is a spiritual one; so we, too, are enthusiastic in speaking to you, knowing that we bring these divine teachings to attentive listeners.

(2) The farmer (105c) is like this, too: he gives the soil all the attention he is capable of—digging the furrows, hauling the plough, rooting out thorns—so when he finds the pasture rich and fertile, he sows the seed lavishly; buoyed up already with high hopes he counts the days to the sprouting of the crop, recalling the productivity of the land and expecting a harvest far in excess of the sowing. That is the way we behave,

1. Gn 2.8.

too: we see your enthusiasm increasing day by day, your interest blossoming, and your zeal bearing fruit. We have high hopes of you, and with greater enthusiasm and zeal ourselves we strive as far as we are able to contribute to the building up of your love, to God's glory and the pride of God's church.

(3) (105d) So come now, if you please, let us recall the few things said yesterday, and move on in turn to today's reading. We need to say what it was we were discussing yesterday, how far we got, and where we stopped. "God formed the human being, taking dust from the earth, and he breathed into him a breath of life; the human being became alive."² What I was saying before I will say now, and will not cease saying continually, that great and unspeakable is the kindness of the Lord of all creatures towards us men. He displayed great considerateness for the sake of our welfare, and bestowed great honor on this creature—namely, the human person—and made plain in words and deeds that he exhibits greater care of human beings than of other visible things. (106a) There is no reason why I should not presume on your goodness to explore the same theme today, too. For, just as with grains of incense, the more they are moved about with your fingers, the greater fragrance they give out, so it is with the Scriptures in our experience: the more you devote yourself to studying them, the more you are able to discover the treasure hidden in them, and thereby gain great and unspeakable wealth.³

(4) "God," it says, "formed the human being, taking dust from the earth. Do you notice straightway the difference in the way the sentence opens? In the case of all the other creatures blessed Moses taught us the manner of creation, saying, "God said, Let there be light, and there was light;" "Let the firmament be made;" "Let the water be gathered together;" "Let the stars be made;" (106b) "Let the earth put forth a crop

2. Gn 2.7.

3. Reference has been made above (Homily 3, note 3) to the figures Chrysostom employs for the Scriptures and homilies upon them; and while patristic commentators like H. De Lubac have established there is little original in these figures, Chrysostom has obviously worked hard at his task to produce the series of them that introduce this homily.

of vegetation;" "Let the waters bring forth reptiles with living souls;" and "Let the earth bring forth a living thing." Do you see how they were all created by a word? Let us notice instead what it says in the case of the creation of human beings. "God formed the human being." Do you see how, by the considerateness shown in the words he uses on account of our limitations, it teaches us both the manner of the creation and the difference, and all but shows us (so to speak in human fashion) man being shaped by God's hands—as another author says, "Your hands made me, and formed me."⁴

(5) You see, if he had simply ordered that the human person spring out of the earth, then the object of the order would merely have been produced, would it not? Instead, for the purpose of communicating to us lasting teaching through the manner of creation (106c) to avoid an impression false to reality, everything is explained precisely in this way, and the text reads, "God formed the human being, taking dust from the earth."⁵

(6) Even in this detail notice the regard for us. I mean, he does not simply take some soil, but dust, the finest grains of soil, so to say, and this very dust of the earth by his own design he changed into the human kind of body. You see, just as he brought into being the very substance of the soil when it did not exist, so now, at will, he changed the dust from soil into body. At this it is good to exclaim what was said by blessed David, "Who will speak of the wonders of the Lord, and bring to our ears all his praises?"⁶—namely, that from dust he produced such a creature and elevated it to such eminence, and that he displays such marks of regard for it right from the outset, revealing in all this his own loving kindness. (106d)

4. Job 10.8.

5. Again (and again) Chrysostom's commentary on details of the text relates its precision to divine considerateness for human limitations for the sake of our salvation—his own synthesis and a beautiful theology of the Word. A modern commentator, interestingly, by contrast with Chrysostom and with a knowledge of Hebrew but perhaps not Chrysostom's theological depth, would rather comment on the play on words at this point between *'adam*, "man," and *'adama*, "soil."

6. Ps 106.2.

The text says, "He breathed into him a breath of life; the human being became alive."

(7) In this regard some senseless people, moved by their own reasoning, and having no regard for what is proper to God nor any appreciation of the considerateness revealed in the words, try to say that the soul comes from the substance of God. Such madness, such stupidity! What false paths has the devil prepared for those bent on following him! To realize it, consider how these paths lead in quite different directions. Some seize on a reading of the text, "He breathed," to say that souls come from the substance of God, whereas others on the contrary say they change into the substance of the worst of brute beasts. What could be worse than such folly? Since their reasoning is dulled, and (107a) they miss the true meaning of Scripture, they are like men blinded in the eyes of their mind, stumbling in various directions down cliffs: some accord the soul excessive esteem, others depress it unduly. Because if they wanted to assign a mouth to God on the score of Scripture's saying, "He breathed into him," they would have to equip him with hands too, since it says, "He formed the human being."

(8) Anyhow, in case by wanting to make a display of these people's stupidity we, too, find ourselves induced to utter unseemly remarks, let's have done with their folly and turn aside from such idiocy; let us follow the direction of Sacred Scripture in the interpretation it gives of itself,⁷ provided we don't get completely absorbed in the concreteness of the words, but realize that our limitations are the reason for the concreteness of the language. (107b) Human senses, you see, would never be able to grasp what is said if they had not the benefit of such great considerateness.

7. Another sound hermeneutical principle of Chrysostom's, which he repeats shortly after in this homily. It is not confined to his thinking; a commentator, J.-M. Leroux, remarks: "Le principe n'est pas nouveau; il fait même partie des lois fondamentales de l'exégèse patristique, et on peut le reconstruire en des termes presque identiques dans les écrits d'Origène et d'Augustin" ("Relativité et transcendance du texte biblique d'après Jean Chrysostome," *La Bible et Les Pères: Colloque de Strasbourg 1969* [Paris 1971] 72).

(9) So recognizing our limitations, and the fact that what is said refers to God, let us accept the words as equivalent to speaking about God; let us not reduce the divine to the shape of bodies and the structure of limbs, but understand the whole narrative in a manner appropriate to God. For the deity is simple, free of parts and shape; should we form an impression from ourselves and want to ascribe an arrangement of limbs to God, we would be in danger of falling into the irreverence pagans are guilty of. So when you hear Scripture saying, "God formed the human being," think of the same power as was responsible for "Let it be made;" likewise when you hear the sentence, "He breathed into him a breath of life," reason this way too, that just as he created the incorporeal beings, (107c) so he decided this body made from the dust should have a rational soul and be able to use a body's limbs. You see, this body created in the Lord's design was like an instrument needing someone to activate it, rather like a lyre that needs someone who can by his own skill and artistry raise a fitting hymn to the Lord through his own limbs, as though by the strings of the lyre. The text says: "He breathed into him a breath of life, and the human being became alive." What is the sense of that, "He breathed a breath of life"? The body made this way, it is saying, he wanted to have a living force and he so directed; this became for the creature a living soul—in other words, full of movement, with the ability to display its own skill through the movement of its limbs.

(10) Notice, too, in this account the difference between this wonderful creature of reason (107d) and the creation of the brute beasts. Regarding them, remember, it says, "Let the waters produce reptiles with living souls," and at once the living beings emerged from the waters; likewise in the case of the earth in the same terms: "Let the earth produce a living being." Not so, however, in the case of the human person: first its body is created from the dust, and afterwards the power of life is given to it, and this is the being of the soul. Accordingly Moses said about the beasts, "Its blood is its life."⁸ But in the

case of the human person its being is incorporeal and immortal, and has a great superiority over the body, to the same extent as incorporeal form surpasses the corporeal.

(11) Perhaps, however, someone may say: Why is it that, if the soul is more important than the body, the lesser is created first, and then the greater afterwards? Don't you see, dearly beloved, that even in the process of creation this very sequence is followed? (108a) That is to say, just as heaven and earth, the sun and moon, and everything else is created, including the brute beasts, and after all these the human person, the one destined to enjoy control of all of them, in the very same way in the actual creation of the human person the body is produced first and then the soul, greater though its importance is. The procedure is the same with the brute beasts: though they are destined to be useful in the service of human beings, they are created before them so that the ones intended to enjoy the use of these beasts will find them ready for service. So, too, the body is created before the soul, so that when the soul is produced according to God's ineffable wisdom, it will be able to display its own vital forces through the movement of its body.

(12) The text goes on: "The Lord God planted a garden in Eden in the east, and placed in it the human being he had formed." When the Lord of all had demonstrated his characteristic loving kindness (108b) in creating the one for whom everything had been provided, and setting him in its midst, immediately he began to bestow on this human person deeds of kindness. "God," it says, "planted a garden in Eden in the east." Notice here, dearly beloved, that unless we take the words in a manner appropriate to God, we will inevitably be trapped in a deep pitfall. I mean, what would be likely to be said about this sentence, too, by those rash enough to interpret in human fashion everything said about God? "God planted a garden," it says. What does that mean, pray? did he have need of tools, and gardening, and every other skill to beautify the garden? Not at all. Rather, in this case too, we need to understand the word "planted" in this sense—namely, that he commanded a garden to be created on the earth so

that the human being he had produced should live in the garden. I mean, to prove that he created the garden for human beings, listen to Scripture itself saying, "God planted a garden in Eden (108c) in the east, and placed in it the human being he had formed."

(13) The reason blessed Moses inserted the name of the place in the text was that it would not be possible for those inclined to take things lightly to deceive the ears of the simple and say the garden was not on earth but in heaven, and dream up wild theories of that kind. You see, despite the use of such precision by Sacred Scripture, some people have not questioned the glib words of arrogant commentators and far-fetched philosophy, even to the extent of denying Holy Writ and saying the garden was not on earth, giving contrary views on many other passages, taking a direction opposed to a literal understanding of the text, and thinking that what is said on the question of things on earth has to do with things in heaven. And, if blessed Moses had not used such simplicity of expression and such considerateness, the Holy Spirit (108d) directing his tongue, where would we not have come to grief? Sacred Scripture, though, whenever it wants to teach us something like this, gives its own interpretation, and doesn't let the listener go astray. On the other hand, since the majority of listeners apply their ears to the narrative, not for the sake of gaining some profit but for enjoyment, they are at pains to take note of things able to bring enjoyment rather than those that bring profit. So, I beg you, block your ears against all distractions of that kind, and let us follow the norm of Sacred Scripture.⁹ And when, dearly beloved, you hear that "God planted a garden in Eden in the east," take the word "planted" in a sense appropriate to God, namely, that he commanded this happen; and, about the next phrase, believe that a garden came into being, and in that place that Scripture indicated. Not to believe in the contents (109a) of Sacred Scripture, and introduce instead other views from one's own reasoning, is in

9. Again the exhortation to follow the norm (*canōn* in Chrysostom's terms) of Scripture itself (cf. note 7 above).

my opinion to bring great peril to those rash enough to attempt it.

(14) "He placed in it," the text says, "the human being he had formed." Notice at once the regard he shows towards him. Having created him outside the garden, he immediately brought him in so as to provide him with an experience of his kindness through the things in the garden; he was introduced into the garden so that he might know the regard God had for him through the actions done there. "He placed in it the human being he had formed." The word "placed" let us interpret this way: he ordered him to live there in order that what he saw and his way of life should give him much pleasure, and should awaken him to an expression of thanks in consideration of all the kindness he had received without ever doing anything to deserve it. (109b) So don't let the reading "placed" disturb you; it is, after all, the unfailing custom of Scripture to employ human ways of speaking for our sake and for our benefit. To be convinced of this, notice how previously, in the case of creation of the stars, it used the same term in saying, "He placed them in the firmament of heaven," not that we should think of them fixed in heaven (for each of them pursues its own path moving from place to place), but to teach us that he commanded them to be in heaven just as he commanded the human being to live in the garden. "God also produced from the earth every tree beautiful to behold and good to eat, the tree of life in the middle of the garden, and the tree for knowing good and evil."¹⁰ Behold still another form of kindness out of regard for this creature. (109c) You see, since he wanted him to live in the garden, he ordered various trees to come forth from the earth, that could both delight him with their appearance and be pleasing to the taste. "Every tree," it says, "beautiful to behold"—that is, in appearance—"and good to eat;" in short, they had the ability to please him through their appearance and to provide much pleasure through their taste, and by their great abundance offered considerable good cheer to the one in a position to en-

10. Gn 2.9.

joy them. You see, it says, "Every tree," whatever name you give it, he made come forth. Do you recognize here a life free of any care? Do you see a wonderful existence? Like some angel, in fact, man lived this way on earth, wearing a body, yet being fortunately rid of any bodily needs; like a king adorned with sceptre and crown and wearing his purple robe, (109d) he revelled in this life of freedom and great affluence in the garden.

(15) "The tree of life in the middle of the garden," the text goes on to say, "and the tree for knowing good and evil." After teaching us that, according to the Lord's command, the earth produced every tree, lovely to behold and good to taste, it says next: "The tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree for knowing good and evil." The good Lord, you see, knowing as creator the harm that would in due time be likely to arise from this condition of great freedom, brought forth the tree of life in the middle of the garden, and the tree for knowing good and evil, since before long he would be imposing on him abstinence from the tree so that man might realize that he owed enjoyment of them to divine love and goodness, and that God was Lord (110a) and creator of his nature as of all visible things. Beforehand, therefore, he made mention of the tree, and next he tells us the names of the rivers and their division, so to say, and that from that source, which irrigated the garden, others led off in four directions and thus marked out the regions of the earth. Perhaps, however, those people who like to talk from their own wisdom do not concede again that these rivers are rivers, or these waters really waters, but propound some different interpretation to people ready to lend them their ears.¹¹

(16) Let us, however, I beg you, not be convinced by them, but block our ears against them; let us instead place our cre-

11. There is something strange about this rapid movement to a close of the homily in place of Chrysostom's usual lengthy parennetic conclusion. In place of it we have the barest exegesis of the tree for knowing good and evil—an obvious gem for Chrysostom with his moral style of commentary—and the briefest of references to the four rivers of vv.10-14. Something has happened to the homilist or the text of the homily.

dence in Sacred Scripture and heed what is told us there; let it be our concern to lay its sound teachings in our soul and be scrupulously careful about them and about our life, (110b) so that our life may witness to the teachings and the teachings may declare the integrity of our life. After all, it will be of no avail for us to get teachings right if we neglect life; nor will we be able to gain any value for our salvation if we have life but neglect right teachings. It is necessary, you see, if we would wish to avoid hell and reach heaven, to be distinguished for both—correctness of doctrine and attention to life. What good, after all, tell me, is a tree reaching to the sky and bearing leaves aplenty if it is devoid of fruit? So, too, with the Christian: correct doctrine is of no benefit unless one attends to the business of living. Accordingly Christ declared such people blessed: "Blessed is the one who does and teaches."¹² I mean, far more dependable and trustworthy than the teaching of words is teaching in action.

(17) Such persons, (110c) in fact, even without uttering a word, or else without being seen, can teach others, in the one case by the silent witness of their appearance and in the other through the sense of hearing; they will enjoy God's goodwill in great measure, promoting as they do the glory of their Lord, not only through their own efforts but also through those who notice them. Such persons raise thanks and praise to the God of all on a thousand tongues and in many mouths; for it is not only those who know them, the witnesses of their life, that will admire them and their Lord, but strangers who hear about it from others, people living far away and distant foreigners, not only friends but foes as well, who will respect the eminence of their virtue. Such is its efficacy, you see, that it stops the mouths of adversaries and bridles their tongue. And just as people with poor sight (110d) flinch from looking at the sun's rays, likewise evil will never be able to confront virtue, but will yield ground, turn away, and admit defeat.

(18) Convinced then of this, let us hold fast to virtue, and pass our lives safely, taking care to avoid the slightest appear-

12. A precis of Mt 5.19.

ance of sin in word or deed. In this way, you see, we will never fall into the worst of sins if we avoid small ones; and with the passage of time we will be able under the influence of help from on high to attain the pinnacle of virtue, escape any future punishment, and gain eternal reward, through the grace and loving kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, power and honor, now and forever, for ages of ages. Amen. (111a)

HOMILY 14

*"The Lord God took the human being that he had formed and placed him in the garden of delights to till it and watch over it."*¹



ODAY AGAIN, IF you don't mind, we will continue in the direction of yesterday's sermon, and apply ourselves to the task of drawing out from there the thread of spiritual teaching for your benefit. There is, you see, great force concealed in the words read just now; we need to go into them at great depth and study them all with precision so as to reap the benefit they offer. To make a comparison with people trying to discover gems in the sea: they submit to such toil and trouble and expose themselves to the buffeting of the waves in order to light upon the object of their search. Consequently, we should apply our minds much more diligently to the task of discovering what lies concealed below the surface of the words, and thus lay hold of these valuable gems.

(2) Don't be concerned, dearly beloved, (111b) to hear reference to depths. In this case, you see, there is no unruly surge of waves; instead, there is the grace of the Spirit shining upon our minds, making possible for us an effortless discovery of what we seek and rendering every difficulty light. So whereas, on the one hand, the discovery of those other gems brings to one who chances upon them a benefit that is not extraordinary, on the other hand, it often results in injury and proves to be the cause of countless shipwrecks: the searcher does not gain joy from the discovery to the same extent as he is afflicted by unpleasantness in his discovery on account of the glances

1. Gn 2.15, Chrysostom's variant of the LXX mentioning a garden "of delights" continued in the Vulgate.

he attracts to himself from envious onlookers, exciting the greedy to enmity against him. To this extent the discovery of that type of stone, far from simply bringing no advantage to one's life, also proves the occasion of numerous contests. It lays the groundwork for greed, you see, it stokes the furnace of cupidity and lays siege to the soul of those caught up in it. (111c) In the case of these spiritual stones of great value, on the contrary, no such problem is to be feared; instead, the wealth to be won from them is beyond telling, the pleasure from them is proof against defect and surpasses by a great margin all joy accruing to human beings from that other source.

(3) Listen to David's words on the subject: "Your sayings are more to be desired than gold and much precious metal."² Do you see how he made open reference to those materials considered more valuable than others yet was not only dissatisfied with this comparison but added the word "much" and thence he clarified for us at that point the superiority involved: "More than gold," the text says, "and much precious metal." The reason that he made reference to these substances was not for the reason that the divine sayings are to be desired to that extent alone but because he recognized that only these substances enjoy the utmost pre-eminence in human estimation—hence by referring to them (111d) he demonstrated the superiority intended and the ardor of the desire felt for the sayings of the Spirit. So that you may learn that it is the unfailing practice of Sacred Scripture to compare the benefit that comes from it with perceptible realities and thus demonstrate the superiority of the former, listen also to what follows. He went on, at any rate, to add: "And sweeter than honey and a honeycomb." In this case, too, the reference is not for the reason that they are sweeter only to that extent, or can provide only that kind of sweetness, but because he had nothing else among material things to compare to the sweetness of the divine sayings—hence by referring to them he showed again

2. Ps 19.10.

their superiority and declared the sweetness of the spiritual teachings to be greater.

(4) You will find Christ, too, applying the same norm in the Gospels. When he was speaking to the disciples, remember, they were anxious to learn the meaning of the parable of the man (112a) sowing good seed in the field and his enemy throwing weeds in among the grain, so he explained to them the whole parable in detail, asking who was the man sowing the good seed, what was the field, what were the weeds and who scattered them, who were the harvesters and what was the harvest. When he had clarified all that for them, he then said, "Good people will be as brilliant as the sun in the kingdom of their Father"³—not for the reason that good people will have only that kind of brilliance, but to show that they will have much greater brilliance; he mentioned that kind because it is impossible to find a stronger image than that from among visible things. So when we hear something like that, let us not stop short at the literal level; instead, let us reason from the perceptible and visible realities to the superiority of spiritual realities in particular. Accordingly, if it is possible to discover the keener desire (112b) and the more heightened sweetness in this case (these sayings being, after all, divine and spiritual, and thus capable of prompting in the soul great spiritual joy), let us with great yearning and strong desire apply our ears to the words so that we may gain from them for ourselves true wealth and welcome many seeds that will germinate into right thinking about God, and thus make our way home.

(5) Let us, therefore, listen to what has been read today. Keep your mind ever attentive, however, I ask you, shake off all sloth and concerns for things of this life, and thus heed the words spoken. They are, after all, divine laws brought down from heaven for our salvation. To make a comparison: when letters are read out from our emperor, there is complete silence, all din and tumult hushed, everyone standing with eager attention and desire to hear (112c) what it is the imperial letters convey; anyone making the slightest noise or inter-

3. Mt 13:43.

rupting the flow of the reading runs the greatest risk.⁴ Much more in this present case is there need to stand in fear and trembling, maintain utter silence, and rid yourselves of confusion in your thinking so that you may be able to understand what is said, while the King of heaven may accept your responsiveness and deem you worthy of greater favors.

(6) Accordingly, let us see what blessed Moses teaches us today also, telling us this as he does, not only by his own tongue but under the inspiration of the grace of the Spirit. He says: "The Lord God took the human being that he had formed." Right from the outset he has nicely put the two terms together: he didn't just say, "The Lord," and stop there, but added, "God," teaching us something that had escaped our notice and lain concealed in the text, (112d) so that we might realize that whether we hear "Lord" or "God" there is no difference in the names.⁵ This point, however, I am not making without reason: my purpose is that when you hear Paul saying, "There is one God the Father, from whom all things come, and one Lord Jesus Christ, for whom all things exist,"⁶ you won't think there is a difference in the expressions, one referring to a greater and the other to a lesser. Hence Scripture employs these names interchangeably so that people inclined to controversy may have no encouragement to assail orthodoxy with a figment of their own imagination. That you may learn that Sacred Scripture says none of these things with distinction and discrimination in mind, notice precisely what emerges from this very sentence under consideration. "The Lord God took," it says. To whom does the heretic want this to refer? The Father alone? Very well, then. Listen to Paul's words: (113a) "There is one God the Father, from whom all things come, and one Lord Jesus Christ, for whom all things

4. This is another of the more celebrated figures Chrysostom employs for Sacred Scripture, akin to that of the letters sent by God and delivered by Moses that is elaborated in Homily 2.

5. For Chrysostom there are no traces of different sources for the names employed in his text; but perhaps we are still surprised to find him asserting their complete equivalence, something an acquaintance with the Hebrew language and mentality would have discouraged in him.

6. 1 Cor 8.6.

exist." Do you see how he applies the word "Lord" to the Son? So would they say the word "Lord" is greater than "God"? See how anomalous this is, and the extent of the blasphemy it provides a basis for. You see, whenever people are unwilling to take the consequences of following the norm of Sacred Scripture,⁷ wishing to make room for the vagaries of private reasoning, they upset their sense of balance and undermine the solid orthodoxy of dogmas with endless disputes and questioning.

(7) "The Lord God took the human being that he had formed," the text says, "and placed him in the garden of delights to till it and watch over it." See the extent of the providence he employs in regard to the human being he has created. I mean, after blessed Moses taught us yesterday that, to quote him, (113b) "God planted the garden and placed in it the human creature"—in other words, he wanted him to have his dwelling place there and pass his days in enjoyment of the garden—today he goes on to show us God's unspeakable love manifested in his regard. Taking up this theme he says: "The Lord God took the human being he had formed and placed him in the garden of delights." He did not simply say, "In the garden," but added, "of delights," so as to reveal to us the exceeding pleasure he enjoyed from living there. And after saying, "He placed him in the garden of delights," he said, "to till it and watch over it." A mark, this, of great solicitude.

(8) I mean, since life there was filled with every delight, was a pleasure to behold (113c) and a thrill to enjoy, he arranged accordingly that the human being should till the garden and watch over it lest he be unsettled by the exceeding indulgence ("Idleness," Scripture says, remember, "has been the teacher of every evil"⁸). Well, why, do you ask, did the garden require attention by him? I'm not telling you that, but in fact God wanted him for a while to take some slight care that was appropriate in both watching and tilling. If, after all, he had

7. Again Chrysostom's insistence on following the norm, *canon*, of Scripture itself in interpreting it, as he insisted even more strongly in Homily 13.

8. Sir. 33.28.

been relieved of all need to work, he would have fallen a victim to great indulgence and at once have slipped into sloth; whereas in fact by performing some work that was painless and without difficulty he would be brought to a better frame of mind.

(9) That phrase, "to watch over it," is not added idly: it is an instance of considerateness in expression to the effect that he might be fully aware that he was subject to a master who had regaled him with such enjoyment, and along with that enjoyment entrusted him with its protection. (113d) God, you see, creates everything and arranges it for our salvation, and as well as that presents us with enjoyment and relaxation. If on account of his exceeding love he prepared those ineffable goods before creating us—as he himself says, "Come, you blessed of my Father, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world"⁹—much more will he provide us with everything in this world in generous measure.

(10) So he conferred such favors on this creature, first bringing him from non-being to being, then deeming it proper to shape his body from dust, and after that as the supreme gesture bestowing on him his incorporeal soul through the action of breathing, then bidding the garden be created and directing him to spend his life there, later, like a (114a) loving father who prevents his young child from being unsettled by great relaxation and freedom from care by devising some slight responsibility appropriate to the situation, the Lord God in like manner ordered the task of tilling and guarding for Adam so that along with all those delights, relaxation and freedom from care he might have, by way of a stabilizing influence, those two tasks to prevent him from overstepping the limit. So these things had already happened to the newly created being, whereas what happened in addition makes clear to us again the great and unsurpassed love for him, as well as the considerateness he displays on account of his own good-

9. Mt 25:34.

ness. What in fact does Scripture say? "The Lord God instructed Adam."¹⁰

(11) In this case also notice him once more following the same habit so that we might receive a precise statement of the teaching through the repetition of the terms, and no longer tolerate those people presuming to make distinctions in assigning the names ascribing one to the Father and the other to the Son. In fact, since (114b) both have the one essence, logically Sacred Scripture can be found applying the same name interchangeably to the Father in one place and to the Son in another. The text says, "The Lord God instructed Adam in these words." At this we very properly are astonished at God's loving kindness beyond all telling, which he reveals to us through this brief sentence. "He instructed," it says. Notice from the outset how much esteem he evidences for the human being. I mean, it didn't say, He commanded, or He ordered, but "He instructed." Just as one friend is said to instruct another about some pressing needs, God, too, in like manner conducts his relationship with Adam, just as if he wants to win him over through this attitude of esteem to obedience to his instructions. "The Lord God instructed Adam in these words: 'From all the trees in the garden you are to eat your fill, but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil do not eat. (114c) On the day that you eat from it you will truly die.'"¹¹

(12) No great difficulty in this instruction. Yet, dearly beloved, sloth is a terrible fault:¹² just as it makes easy things seem hard to us, so enthusiasm and alertness render even hard things easy for us. I mean, what, I ask you, could be simpler than this instruction? What could be greater than the esteem shown here? Provision had been made for his spend-

10. Gn 2.16. Chrysostom finds "Adam" in his LXX text, which is probably misreading the Heb. for "the man," whereas the naming of Adam comes later, in ch.5—though in a consonantal Heb. text the two forms are indistinguishable when preceded by a preposition as here. (See Speiser's remarks on Gn 2.22, *Genesis* 18.)

11. Gn 2.16–17.

12. So Chrysostom's pet aversion, *rhathumia*, "sloth, indifference" (cf. Homily 10, note 5 above and earlier references), now becomes the original sin.

ing life in the garden, for enjoying the beauty of visible things, for gladdening the eye from that experience, and gaining much pleasure from that enjoyment. Consider, after all, how great a thrill it was to see the trees groaning under the weight of their fruit, to see the variety of the flowers, the different kinds of plants, the leaves on the branches, and all the other things you would be likely to chance upon in a garden, especially a garden planted by God. On that account, you see, Sacred Scripture had said previously that "he produced from the earth every tree fair to behold and good to eat,"¹³ so that we might know that, (114d) despite his enjoyment of such plenty, the human being trampled underfoot the instruction given him, out of his great intemperance and sloth. I mean, consider, I ask you, dearly beloved, the high degree of esteem he had lavished upon him, laying for him in the garden a table set apart for him to suit his tastes, in case you might think the same food was supplied for him as for the brute beasts: instead, passing his time in that garden like a king he could revel in its enjoyment, and like a master he had no occasion to mix with those ministering to him but had a life all to himself.

(13) "The Lord God instructed Adam in these words: 'From every tree in the garden you are to eat your fill; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil do not eat. On the day you eat from it you will truly die'"—as if to say to him, Surely it's not something harsh and burdensome I'm demanding of you? While entrusting you with enjoyment of everything, (115a) only this one thing I'm instructing you not to touch; but I also decree a severe penalty so that fear of it may help you keep your balance and you may observe the direction given you by me. He did this in the manner of a kindly master entrusting his huge residence to someone and prescribing some humble coin to be given by him as a pledge for keeping the ownership intact for himself. Well, in quite the same way our loving Lord lavished on the human being the enjoyment of everything in the garden, and bade him abstain from one

13. Gn 2.9.

tree only so as to be in a position to know that he is subject to the Lord, whom he should obey and to whose commands he should submit.

(14) Who could adequately admire the generosity of the common Lord of all? With what great kindness he regales the creature who has not yet anything to show for himself? I mean, he did not (115b) confine to half the garden the enjoyment he permitted, nor bid him abstain from most things and retain the enjoyment of the remainder. Instead, he wanted him to partake of everything in the garden and ordered him to abstain from the one tree only, showing through these things he had no other purpose in his actions than that he should be able to recognize the one responsible for such acts of kindness. Notice in this case as well as others God's goodness, how much regard he demonstrates also for the woman due to be formed from man. I mean, though she is yet to be created he gives instruction as though to two people in the words, "Do not eat from it," and, "On the day ye eat from it you will truly die," showing right from the outset that man and woman are one, as Paul also says, "The man is head of the woman."¹⁴ So he speaks as though to two people for this reason, (115c) that when later he has formed the woman from man, he may provide the latter with an excuse for acquainting her with God's instructions.

(15) I am aware that this question about the tree is commonly debated, and that many people inclined to speak incautiously endeavor to shift the blame from human beings to God, presuming to ask, Why on earth did he give him the instruction in the knowledge that he would infringe it? and again, Why did he order the tree to be in the garden? and many other such queries. In case, however, at this stage before the right time for discussion of the Fall we should seem to be rushing into exegesis about such matters, we ought wait for blessed Moses' account so as to reach that passage by this means at the appropriate stage and raise with you in that regard whatever matters God's grace has communicated, and

14. Eph 5.23.

thus teach you, dear people, the true mind of Scripture. Thus, (115d) in your knowledge of the truth of the sacred writings you may both offer to the Lord due praise and also escape at the hands of the guiltless God a share in the sinner's guilt through neglect of him.

(16) The moment has arrived at long last, however, it would seem, for us to proceed with the theme of the reading. "The Lord God said," the text goes on, "It is not good for the human being to be alone." See how once again it said in the same way as previously, "The Lord God," so that we should rivet the words on our minds and not think the fruit of our human reasoning to be superior to Sacred Scripture. "The Lord God said," it says, "It is not good for the human being to be alone."¹⁵ Notice how the good God does not stop short, but adds kindness to kindness, and, in an abundance of riches, wants to clothe this rational being in every degree of esteem, and along with this esteem to regale him with a life of ease. The text says, remember, "The Lord God said, 'It is not good for (116a) the human being to be alone. Let us make him a helpmate like himself.'" Notice here again the expression, "Let us make." In other words, just as he said at the beginning in the case of the formation of the human being, "Let us make a human being in our image and likeness," so now, too, on the point of forming woman he employs the same expression, saying, "Let us make." To whom does he address it? Not to any created power, but to the One begotten of him, Wonderful Counsellor, Figure of Authority, Prince of Peace, his only-begotten Son.¹⁶ So that Adam may learn that the being in process of being formed is meant to enjoy equality of esteem with him, accordingly just as he said in the man's case, "Let us make," so he now says also, "Let us make him a helpmate like himself." Both expressions, helpmate and like himself have much significance. (116b)

(17) I do not want him to be alone, Scripture is saying, but to have some support from company, and not this only but a helpmate suited to him should be produced, hinting at

15. Gn 2.18.

16. Cf. Is 9.6.

woman. Hence he said, "Let us make him a helpmate," and added, "like himself," so that when shortly you saw wild beasts produced and all the birds of heaven, you would not think reference was made to them. I mean, even if many of the brute beasts helped him in his labors, there was still nothing equivalent to a woman, possessed as she was of reason. Hence he said, "a helpmate like himself," and added, "Further, God formed from the earth all the wild beasts of the field and all the birds of heaven; he led them to Adam to see what he would call them, and each name Adam gave a living being, that was its name."¹⁷

(18) It is not idly and to no (116c) purpose that this happens, but on account of what was due to take place shortly afterwards. In his foreknowledge of it, God shows us the great intelligence with which he endowed the being created by him, so that when the event occurs of the transgression of the instruction given by God, you won't think the human being sinned through ignorance but will be in a position to know that it was a sin of sloth. I mean, the fact of his being lavishly endowed with intelligence, learn from what happens now. The text says: "He led them to Adam to see what he would call them." He does this out of a desire to provide us with a demonstration of Adam's great intelligence. And further, "The name Adam gave," the text says, "was its name."

(19) This happens, not that we may merely learn of his intelligence but that a symbol of his dominion may be provided through the imposition of the names. You see, (116d) with human beings also this normally constitutes a symbol of dominion—when they buy slaves, to change their names. Hence God provides that Adam, too, as their master should give names to the brute beasts. I mean, dearly beloved, don't pass the expression idly by; consider, instead, I ask you, the extent of his intelligence demonstrated by his giving names to such species of winged creatures, reptiles, wild beasts, beasts of burden and the other brute beasts, the tame and the wild, those that inhabit the deeps, those that spring from the earth—

¹⁷. Gn 2.19.

to all these he gave names that indicated his dominion and that were appropriate to each species—as the text says, “Each name Adam gave was its name.” Do you see the unrivalled authority? Do you see his lordly dominance? Consider in addition to other factors this event, that lions, panthers, snakes, scorpions, serpents, and (117a) all the other animals fiercer than those, came in complete subjection to him as to a master and accepted the names, while Adam had no fear of these wild beasts.

(20) So let no one call in question what is created by the Lord nor sharpen the tongue against the Creator—or, rather, against his own head—and say those stupid words, Why were the wild beasts produced? I mean, the imposition of names shows us precisely that all animals, tame included, acknowledged their servitude and the human dominion; after all, those names that he imposed on them remain up to the present time.¹⁸ In this way God determined that we might retain a constant reminder of the esteem which the human being from the outset received from the Lord of all and might attribute responsibility for its removal to the person who (117b) by sin put an abrupt end to his authority.

(21) “Adam gave names to all the cattle,” the text goes on, “all the birds of heaven, and all the beasts of the earth.”¹⁹ Notice already in this case, I ask you, dearly beloved, his independence of decision and the eminence of his understanding, and don’t say he didn’t know right from wrong. I mean, the being that has the ability to put the right names on cattle, and birds, and beasts without getting the sequence mixed up, not giving to wild beasts the names suited to the tame ones nor allotting to the tame animals what belonged to the wild ones, but giving them all their right names—how could he not be full of intelligence and understanding? Consider finally from this passage how great the force of that breathing, and the intelligence of that incorporeal soul (117c) which the Lord had

18. Said with tongue in cheek? or just an occasional reminder of Chrysostom’s lack of sophistication as a commentator for all his theological profundity?

19. Gn 2.20.

granted him in constituting such a remarkable rational being of two elements, and intertwining the incorporeal element of the soul with the body, like an excellent craftsman related to his instrument. So, whenever you ponder the extent of this being's intelligence, marvel at the Creator's power. After all, if the visible beauty of heaven prompts a well-disposed onlooker to praise of its Creator, much more readily will this rational being, the human person, be able to reason from the manner of its own formation, the eminence of esteem and greatness of gifts accorded it, and thus come to celebrate unceasingly the provider of such ineffable kindnesses and give praise to the Lord for his power.

(22) I had in mind to go on to what follows in the text; but in case (117d) we should impair the recollection of what has been said already by an excess of words, it behoves us to conclude the flow of instruction at this point. After all, it is not simply the object of our concern to say a lot of things heedlessly; rather, we speak with this aim in view, that you will keep them constantly riveted in your mind so as not merely to have knowledge yourselves of the contents of the Holy Scriptures, but also become teachers of others, capable of admonishing them. So let each of you, I beseech you, go away from here, in the company of your neighbor reawaken the memory of what has been said, offer him what comes from your own heart and listen to what has been remembered by him. So, recalling everything spoken here, and keeping it in your memory in this way, make your way home, ruminating on these divine teachings; hence you may give all your attention to these matters and occupy your mind with them, and so be able to overcome with ease troublesome passions and escape the devil's wiles.²⁰ You see, (118a) whenever that evil spirit spies a soul wrapt in the things of God, constantly contemplating them and going over them in mind, he doesn't dare approach;


20. A further reminder that to Chrysostom's mind his congregation were not mere passive recipients of his scriptural instructions but activated to continued meditation on the message and (as we have seen above) students of it in the Bible discussions within the domestic Church.

instead, he makes off at speed, repelled by the force of the Spirit as though by some fire.

(23) So, in order that we may gain the fullest benefit ourselves, may be able to overcome that creature and win grace from God more abundantly, let us occupy our minds with these matters. In this way, you see, everything in our charge will be simplified for us, difficult things will become easy, what seemed threatening will reach a useful conclusion, and nothing on this earth will be able to distress us. I mean, if we concern ourselves with the things of God, he will concern himself with ours, and in complete safety we will navigate the ocean of this life, (118b) and under the guidance of that mighty pilot, the God of all, put into the harbor of his love, to whom be glory and power, now and forever, for unending ages of ages. Amen.

HOMILY 15

"For Adam, however, there proved to be no helpmate of his kind. God caused a drowsiness to come upon Adam, and he fell asleep. God took one of Adam's ribs and closed up the flesh in its place. The Lord God fashioned the rib that he had taken from Adam into a woman."¹

 AM VERY GRATIFIED by you for the fact that yesterday you received with great enthusiasm the exhortation we gave and, far from being upset at the length of the discourse, you followed it to the very end (118c) in such a way that your desire for listening reached great heights and continued at that level. Hence the sound hopes communicated to us that you would translate our advice into practice. I mean, the person who listens with such relish would clearly be prepared for practice of good works; and in a particular way your attendance today would provide a proof of your health of soul. You see, just as hunger is a sign of bodily well-being, so love for divine sayings proves to be the surest sign of the soul's health.

(2) So, when the fruit of your zeal shows the outcome of your attention, well then, let us in turn pay to you, dear people, the reward we promised yesterday—I mean the reward of this spiritual teaching, which has the capacity both to increase my own resources while I am paying it and to render you its recipients wealthy. (118d) All spiritual goods are like this, after all—something that can't be said for material things. In the latter case, in other words, the one who pays reduces his own substance and makes the recipient better off, whereas in the former case, on the contrary, things are different: the one

1. Gn 2.20–22. Cf. Homily 14, note 10 above on the LXX (and Chrysostom's) reading "Adam" in these verses.

who pays increases his own wealth by so doing and the resources of the recipients become greater.

(3) So, since we are well disposed for kindness and you are ready to receive this spiritual wealth, keep the recesses of your mind in a state of readiness. Come now, let us fulfil our promise; let us take up again the thread of the reading from blessed Moses, and discharge our debt to you at this point. We need, therefore, to give an open explanation of the words read yesterday with a view to exploring precisely the richness of thought concealed in the words and (119a) proposing it to you, my dear people. In other words, listen now to the words of Sacred Scripture: "For Adam, however, there proved to be no helpmate of his kind." What is the force of this brief phrase, "For Adam, however"? Why did he add the particle?² I mean, would it not have been enough to say, For Adam? Let us not be heedless in our anxiety to explore these matters, acting out of great curiosity; instead, let us act so as to interpret everything precisely and instruct you not to pass by even a brief phrase or a single syllable contained in the Holy Scriptures. After all, they are not simply words, but words of the Holy Spirit, and hence the treasure to be found in even a single syllable is great. So attend carefully, I beseech you: let everyone give an alert attention, I ask you, no one sluggish, no one drowsy; (119b) let no one be distracted in thinking of outside concerns, or bring here the worries of daily life and stay wrapt in them. Instead, consider the dignity of this spiritual gathering and the fact that we are listening to God speaking to us through the tongue of the inspired authors. Give your attention in this way and keep your mind alert lest any of the seeds sown by us will fall on rock, or by the roadside, or among thistles; instead, let the whole batch of seeds be sown

2. A classic instance of Chrysostom's interest in the precision, *akribēia*, of the text, to which he brings (and urges his audience to bring) a like precision to the task of interpretation. And as an index that it is no dry pedantry that lies behind his own precision, there follows his insistence that such textual details are saving gifts of the Spirit who inspires the author. See my article, "Akribēia: a principle of Chrysostom's exegesis," *Colloquium* 14 (Oct. 1981) 32-36 for other examples from Chrysostom's works.

on good ground—I mean the field of your mind—and thus be in a position to yield you a generous crop and multiply the amount sown by us.

(4) Let us see, now at long last, what is the conjunctive force of this particle. “For Adam, however,” the text says, “there proved to be no helpmate of his kind.” Notice, I remind you, the precision of Sacred Scripture. After saying, “For Adam, however, there proved to be no helpmate,” it did not stop there but added, “of his kind,” (119c) clarifying for us by the addition the reason why it formed the conjunction with the particle. I would think the sharper ones among you would probably by now be in a position to apply yourselves to predicting what is about to be said. Since, however, we must keep our instruction addressed to you all alike and make our words clear to everybody, come now, let us teach you why he spoke in that way. But wait just a moment: you remember in what was mentioned before that after Sacred Scripture said, “Let us make him a helpmate like himself,” it immediately taught us about the creation of wild beasts, reptiles and all the irrational animals, saying as it did, “Further, God formed from the earth all the wild beasts of the field and all the birds of heaven; he led them to Adam to see what he would call them.” Like their master he imposed names on them (119d) and to each species he assigned its own name, wild beasts, birds, and all irrational animals according to the intelligence granted him, so that we at this stage might be in a position to know that all those creatures, despite the ministering role they play and the assistance they give human beings in their labors, are nonetheless irrational and in great measure inferior to them—just in case we might think it was about them God said, “Let us make a helpmate for him.” You see, although they are helpful and make a very useful contribution to the service of human beings, they are nonetheless irrational.

(5) The fact that they are helpful, after all, emerges from experience. I mean, some are suited to bearing loads for us, while others to working the soil: an ox draws the plough, cuts furrows, and provides for us much other assistance in farming; likewise an ass makes itself very useful in bearing loads;

and many other of the irrational animals (120a) service our bodily needs. Sheep, after all, meet our needs from their wool for making clothes, and again in similar fashion goats provide a service for us from their coat, their milk and other things related to our living. So in case you think it was in reference to them it was said above, "Let us make him a helpmate," it now begins its statement with the words, "For Adam, however, there proved to be no helpmate of his kind," as if blessed Moses were teaching us in saying these words that, while all these animals were created and received from Adam the assignment of names, nevertheless none of them proved to be adequate for helping him. Accordingly he wants to teach us about the formation of the being about to be brought forth and the fact that this being due for creation is the one he was speaking about. "Let us make him a helpmate like himself," meaning of his kind, with the same properties as himself, (120b) of equal esteem, in no way inferior to him. Hence his words, "For Adam, however, there proved to be no helpmate of his kind," by which this blessed author shows us that whatever usefulness these irrational animals bring to our service, the help provided for Adam by woman is different and immeasurably superior.

(6) So, now that all the animals were created and had received their names from the first man, the loving Lord made it his concern to create a helpmate for him of his kind; having arranged everything with this creature of his in mind and for his sake brought forth all this visible creation, after all the other beings he creates also woman. Notice how he teaches us precisely the process of her creation too. I mean, after teaching us that he wanted to produce for man a helpmate like him by saying previously, "Let us make him a helpmate like himself," (120c) and then adding, "There proved to be no helpmate of his own kind," accordingly he set about the formation of this creature of similar properties to him, and the text says, "God caused drowsiness to come upon Adam, and he slept. God took one of Adam's ribs and closed up the flesh in its place. The Lord God fashioned the rib he had taken from Adam into a woman and brought her to Adam." There is

great force in these words, surpassing all human reasoning. I mean, it is not possible to comprehend their grandeur in any other way than by viewing everything with the eyes of faith. "God caused drowsiness to come upon Adam," the text says, "and he slept."

(7) Notice the precision of the teaching. This blessed author has stipulated both things, or rather the Holy Spirit through his tongue, teaching us the sequence of what happened. "God caused drowsiness to come upon Adam," the text says, "and he slept." (120d) It wasn't simply drowsiness that came upon him nor normal sleep; instead, the wise and skilful Creator of our nature was about to remove one of Adam's ribs. Lest the experience cause him pain and afterwards he be badly disposed towards the creature formed him from his rib, and through memory of the pain bear a grudge against this being at its formation, God induced in him this kind of sleep: He caused a drowsiness to come upon him and bid him be weighed down as though by some heavy weight. His purpose was that, far from allowing man to suffer any sense of what was happening, he should, like some excellent craftsman, do away with mere appearances, supply for any deficiencies and in his own loving kindness create what had thus been taken from man. The text says, remember, "God caused drowsiness to come upon Adam, and he slept. God took one of Adam's ribs and closed up the flesh in its place" so that after the release of sleep he could not feel the loss he was suffering. You see, even if (121a) he was unaware at the time of the removal, nevertheless afterwards he would be likely to realize what had happened. So lest he cause him pain in removing it, or the loss of it cause him any distress later, he thus provided for both eventualities by making the removal painless and supplying for the loss without letting him feel anything of what had happened. So, the text says, the Lord God took the rib and fashioned it into a woman. A remarkable expression, defying our reasoning with its extraordinary boldness. After all, everything done by the Lord has this character: forming the human being from dust is no less remarkable than this.

(8) Notice the considerateness of Sacred Scripture in the

words employed with our limitations in mind: "God took one of his ribs," the text says. Don't take the words in human fashion; rather, (121b) interpret the concreteness of the expressions from the viewpoint of human limitations. You see, if he had not used these words, how would we have been able to gain knowledge of these mysteries which defy description? Let us therefore not remain at the level of the words alone, but let us understand everything in a manner proper to God because applied to God. That phrase, "He took," after all, and other such are spoken with our limitations in mind.

(9) Now consider how here again he follows the same practice as in the case of Adam. I mean, just as in that case he said once, a second time and in fact frequently, "The Lord God took the human being that he had formed," and again, "The Lord God instructed Adam," and further, "The Lord God said, 'Let us make him a helpmate like himself,'" so here too it says, "The Lord God fashioned the rib he had taken from Adam into a woman," and previously, "The Lord God caused drowsiness to come upon Adam," (121c) so that you might know that there is no difference between Father and Son in these expressions; instead, on account of both of them having the one essence, Sacred Scripture applies the names indiscriminately. See at any rate how, in the case of the formation of woman as well, it followed the same practice, saying, "The Lord God fashioned the rib he had taken from Adam into a woman."

(10) What would be said in this case by those heretics who are always intent on calling everything into question and who hold the opinion that the origin of the Creator of all has been comprehended? What words can express the full sense of this? What kind of mind can grasp it? He took one rib, the text says—and how from this single rib did he fashion the complete being? Yet why do I say, how from this single thing did he fashion the being? Tell me, how did the removal happen? How was it he felt nothing of the removal? You can tell me none of these things; (121d) only the one who did the creating knows. So if we don't comprehend these things we are familiar with and what has to do with the formation of the

being of the same race as ourselves, how much madness and folly does it betray to meddle in what concerns the Creator and to allege that those matters have been comprehended which not even incorporeal and divine powers have knowledge of, but rather continue without ceasing to praise in fear and trembling?

(11) "The Lord God," the text says, "fashioned the rib he had taken from Adam into a woman." See the precision of Scripture. I mean, it no longer said, He formed, but "He fashioned," since he took part of what was already formed and, so to say, made up for what was lacking. Hence it says, "He fashioned:" he didn't perform further shaping, (122a) but took some small part of the shaping already done, fashioned this part and made a complete being. How great the power of God, the master craftsman, making a likeness of those limbs from that tiny part, creating such wonderful senses, and preparing a creature complete, entire and perfect, capable both of speaking and of providing much comfort to man by a sharing of her being. For it was for the consolation of this man that this woman was created. Hence Paul also said, "Man was not created for woman, but woman for man."³ Do you see how everything is made for him? I mean, after the act of creation, after the brute beasts were brought forth, some suited for eating and some capable of assisting with man's service, (122b) the human being that had been formed stood in need of someone to talk to and able to offer him much comfort by a sharing of her being. So, from man's rib God creates this rational being, and in his inventive wisdom he makes it complete and perfect, like man in every detail—rational, capable of rendering him what would be of assistance in times of need and the pressing necessities of life. It was God, you see, who was arranging everything in his wisdom and creative power. After all, we for our part, even though unable with the limitations of our reasoning to comprehend the way things happen, nevertheless believe that everything yields to his will and that whatever he directs is in fact brought forth. "The Lord God,"

3. 1 Cor 11.9.

the text says, "fashioned the rib he had taken from Adam into a woman, and led her (122c) to Adam," showing that it was for him that he had made her. He led her to Adam, it says. That is, since among all the other creatures there proved to be no helpmate of his kind (so the text says), lo, the promise I made (having guaranteed as I did to provide you with a helpmate of your kind) I kept by giving you one.

(12) "He led her to Adam," the text says, remember. "Now there is someone, bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh."⁴ Notice here, I ask you, dearly beloved, how along with this ineffable intelligence bestowed on him by God, which he demonstrated to us by the imposition of names he gave to all those species of brute beasts, he was endowed also with the prophetic grace. I mean, the reason why this blessed author taught us in the preceding passages that Adam was overcome by drowsiness and sleep (122d) so as to have no sense at all of what happened was that when you come to know that on seeing the woman he describes her creation precisely, you may have no doubt that he is saying this under the influence of the prophetic grace and the inspiration of instruction by the Holy Spirit. You see, when God led her to him, he said, without knowledge of anything that had happened, "Now there is someone bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh."

(13) Yet some other translator⁵ renders it "This once" instead of "Now", to indicate that this happened only on this occasion, and there will be no repetition of the formation of woman. Now, it is saying, woman has been made from man whereas later it will not be like this; instead, man will come from woman—or rather, not from woman but from the co-operation of the two, as Paul also says, "Man is not from woman, but woman from man; and man was not created (123a) for woman, but woman for man."⁶ True, he is saying, but

4. Gn 2.23.

5. De Montfaucon notes that in fact both Symmachus and Theodotion, second century translators/adaptors, rendered the words thus—an unusually critical comment from Chrysostom, suggesting again the level of sophistication with which he credits his congregation. (See Rahlf's introduction to his *Septuaginta* I.)

6. 1 Cor 11.8–9.

these words indicate that woman was made from man. Still, wait a while and you will see his precise teaching in what follows. He goes on, in fact: "Yet man is not independent of woman nor woman of man,"⁷ teaching us that in the course of things the human being's composition will derive from both man and woman through their intercourse. Hence Adam, too, said, "Now there is someone, bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh."

(14) Then, in order that you may come to realize the precision of his prophecy, and how what he had said has been conspicuous for its brilliance up to the present time and to its fulfilment, listen also to what follows: "She shall be called woman," it says, "because she was taken from her husband." For this reason a man will leave his father and mother, (123b) and will cling to his wife and the two will come to be one flesh."⁸ Do you see how he opened everything up to us, clarifying each detail precisely for us through his own prophecy: "She shall be called woman," it says, "because she was taken from her husband." Again he hints to us of the removal of his rib; then, to indicate what was about to happen, the text says, "For this reason a man will leave his father and his mother, and will cling to his wife and the two will come to be one flesh." Where, tell me, did these things come from for him to utter? From what source did he gain knowledge of future events and the fact that the race of human beings should grow into a vast number? Whence, after all, did he come to know that there would be intercourse between man and woman? I mean, the consummation of that intercourse occurred after the Fall; up till that time (123c) they were living like angels in paradise and so they were not burning with desire, not as-

7. Ib. 11. As we have had occasion to note already in Introduction 14 and Homily 8, note 16, Chrysostom's egalitarianism here regarding the sexes is not altogether typical or sustained.

8. Gn 2.23-24. Chrysostom's Grk text, like the LXX generally, cannot transmit the play upon words *ishshah* . . . *ish* that survives better in English "woman . . . man." On the other hand, the Grk translators tended to introduce an unnecessary future tense to verbs where the present more accurately renders the Heb. (cf. M. Zerwick, *Biblical Greek*, 4th ed., English translation (Rome 1963) ## 279-81).

saulted by other passions, not subject to the needs of nature, but on the contrary were created incorruptible and immortal, and on that account at any rate they had no need to wear clothes. "They were both naked," the text says, remember, "and were not ashamed." You see, while sin and disobedience had not yet come on the scene, they were clad in that glory from above which caused them no shame; but after the breaking of the law, then entered the scene both shame and awareness of their nakedness. So, from what source, tell me, did these things come for him to utter? Surely it's obvious that before his disobedience he had a share in prophetic grace and saw everything through the eyes of the Spirit.

(15) These matters, however, I am bringing to your attention not without purpose; my intention instead is that even in this early instance you may grasp God's surpassing love (123d) displayed in regard to human kind in granting them from the outset an angelic way of life, bestowing countless benefits on them and regaling them with prophetic grace along with all other goods. Then, when by contrast you see mankind's lack of response despite such works of kindness, you may no longer lay responsibility at God's door but recognize it completely as man's. It is He, after all, who became responsible for all the troubles that befell him, to such an extent that in future you may learn both about the loss of such advantages and the condemnation he incurred for his disobedience. You see, whenever I consider the way of life God had granted him, showing him to such a degree generous marks of kindness—firstly, the fact that before his formation he had produced the whole of the created universe for him, and then at that stage created him so that he might come into existence and enjoy (124a) all visible things; next he ordered the garden he created and intended man should pass his life there, marking him off from all the brute beasts and giving him authority over them, and he bade him give them all names in the manner of a master with his slaves; then, when he was alone and needed some helpmate to share with him the same being, far from overlooking this, God brought forth the woman and committed her to the man in the manner he wanted, and after all these

he bestowed on him also the dignity of prophecy. In the wake of these ineffable kindnesses he regaled him with the crown of them all, liberating him from all the concerns of the body, forestalling even the need for wearing clothes or any other necessity. On the contrary, as I said before, he intended man should pass his days on earth like some terrestrial angel. Accordingly, whenever I consider all these things, (124b) I am amazed by the Lord's loving kindness for our race and by man's lack of response, as well as the devil's envy; the evil spirit, after all, could not bear to see an angelic way of life in a human body.

(16) In case, however, we prolong our sermon to a great length, we will, if you like, keep for later the account of the evil spirit's plotting and bring the sermon to a close at this point, urging you in your goodness to remember with precision what has been said and meditate on it all so as to have it firmly lodged in your mind. You see, if you constantly have in mind God's kindnesses which he has conferred on our race, we will ourselves be grateful and as well this habit will prove the greatest encouragement to us along the way of virtue. After all, the person who is mindful of God's kindnesses will clearly make the effort not to appear unworthy of them but to demonstrate such zeal and (124c) gratitude as to be deemed worthy even of further marks of kindness. Our Lord, you see, is prodigal with his favors, and when he sees us behaving gratefully for what has already come to us from him, he lavishes abundant grace on us and deems us worthy of even further gifts, provided we make our salvation a matter of concern and do not let the time slip away idly nor watch half of the holy season of Lent slipping away before our eyes; instead, our concern should be to see to some good conduct in all this season and to correction of the passions that assail us. You see, if it proved to be the case that we remained exactly as we were despite the daily advantage we enjoy of spiritual instruction, and did not devote ourselves to virtue, nor eliminate from our soul the various forms of wickedness, not only would we have gained no advantage but we would have incurred greater harm. I mean, whenever anyone who has the

advantage of such attention gains nothing from it, the greater the fire of Gehenna heaped up for them.

(17) Accordingly, (124d) I beseech you to make proper use of the time remaining in Lent and bring yourselves under close scrutiny each week, or rather each day; rid your soul of deficiencies and lay secure hold on practices of virtue, as the inspired author recommended,⁹ desisting from evil and adopting virtue in its place—such, after all, is true fasting. Let the irascible person rid the soul of this passion that inhibits pious thinking, and turn instead to mildness and reasonableness. Let the slothful and unmortified person, whose fancy is titillated by bodily graces, discipline his thinking and engrave on the texture of his mind the law of the Lord which says, "The man who gazes on a woman so as to lust after her has already committed sin with her in his heart;"¹⁰ let him banish the passion of incontinence and practice sobriety. (125a) Likewise, let the person who is rash in speech and an idle commentator on events imitate the blessed author and say, "Place a guard on my mouth, Lord, and a heavy door about my lips;"¹¹ let him never give vent to words idly and by chance, but listen instead to Paul's warning: "Let all shouting, rage, blasphemy, foul language and ribald jesting be far from you, along with all other forms of wickedness,"¹² and in another place, "May there be some good speech for edification and profit, so as to bring grace on the listeners."¹³ By all means avoid oaths, in response to Christ's condemnation in the words, "It was said to people of old, Do not perjure yourself; but I tell you, take no oaths at all."¹⁴ So don't tell me, I take no oath in a just cause: there is no call for swearing in just cause or unjust. (125b) Accordingly, keep your mouth clean of any oath, and ward off all such from your tongue, your lips, and your mind so that no evil thoughts arise within you or pass beyond your lips. Close your ears securely so as to admit no idle report, as blessed Moses

9. Cf. Ps 37.27.

10. Mt 5.28.

11. Ps 141.3.

12. Eph 4.31, where Chrysostom's list varies somewhat from our received text.

13. Ib.29.

14. Mt 5.33-34 abbreviated.

bade us in the words, "Admit no idle report,"¹⁵ and as blessed David likewise said, "I kept far from me the man maligning his neighbor behind his back."¹⁶

(18) Do you see, dearly beloved, how much vigilance we need, how much effort on our way to virtue? how even some slight neglect brings on us the risk of complete disaster? Hence in another place as well blessed David shouts aloud his accusation against the person guilty of this: "You sit down and slander your brother, (125c) against your mother's son you spread scandal."¹⁷ If we protect all parts of our body in this way, we will be able both to be spurred on to works of virtue and to occupy our tongue in glory and praise of the God of all—our hearing in listening to the divine sayings and learning them, our minds in comprehension of spiritual teachings, our hands in almsgiving and the practice of good deeds rather than in theft and greed, and our feet in entering the church, houses of prayer and the shrines of the holy martyrs rather than theatres, race courses and harmful spectacles, so that we may benefit from the holy discourse in the former and snatch ourselves unharmed (125d) from the devil's wiles. If this is the way we devote our care and attention to our own salvation, we will be able to reap benefit from fasting, escape the snares of the Evil one, and win abundant favor from above. May it be the good fortune of us all to enjoy this, thanks to the grace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, power and honor, now and forever, for ages of ages. Amen.

15. Ex 23.1 according to the LXX.

16. Ps 101.5, the future sense of the Heb. imperfect in this case (by contrast with instances referred to in note 8 above) escaping the LXX.

17. Ps 50.20.

HOMILY 16

On the Fall of the first human beings.

"They were both naked, Adam and his wife, without feeling shame."¹



I WOULD LIKE TODAY, dearly beloved, to open up for you spiritual treasure, which though distributed is never fully exhausted, (126a) which though bringing riches to everyone is in no way diminished but even increased. You see, just as in the case of material treasure people able to collect even a tiny nugget acquire for themselves great wealth, so too in the case of Sacred Scripture you can find in even a brief phrase great power of thought and wealth beyond telling. Such, after all, is the nature of this treasure: it enriches those receiving it without itself ever failing, rising as it does from the source which is the Holy Spirit. It remains for you, however, to keep careful guard on what is entrusted to you and preserve the memory of it untarnished so that you may with ease follow what is said, provided we make our contribution zealously. Grace, you see, is ready at hand and looks only for people welcoming it with generosity. (126b) Let us listen today also to what is read so that we may come to know of God's unspeakable love for humanity and the extent of the considerateness he employs with our salvation in mind.

(2) "They were both naked, Adam and his wife, without feeling shame." Consider, I ask you, the transcendence of their blessed condition, how they were superior to all bodily concerns, how they lived on earth as if they were in heaven, and though in fact possessing a body they did not feel the limitations of their bodies. After all, they had no need of shelter or habitation, clothing or anything of that kind. It was not idly

1. Gn 2.25.

or to no purpose that Sacred Scripture indicated this to us; it was that we might learn of this carefree condition of theirs, their trouble-free life and angelic condition, as you might say, and that (126c) we might attribute it completely to their indifference when later we see them bereft of all these advantages and, as it were, reduced to the utmost indigence after the great abundance of their wealth.

(3) We must, however, listen to the words that have been read. Blessed Moses, remember, told us that they were naked without feeling shame (for they did not know, after all, that they were naked, clad as they were in ineffable glory, which adorned them better than any clothing), and added: "But the serpent was the wildest of all the beasts upon the earth made by the Lord. The serpent said to the woman: 'Why is it that God said, Do not eat of any tree of the garden?'"² See the evil spirit's envy and devious scheming. I mean, he saw that the human being, creature though he was, had the good fortune to enjoy the highest esteem and was scarcely inferior in any respect to the angels, as blessed David also says, "You have placed him on a level scarcely lower than (126d) the angels,"³ and even this "scarcely lower" was the result of disobedience, the inspired author, after all, uttering this after the disobedience. The author of evil, accordingly, seeing an angel who happened to live on earth, was consumed by envy, since he himself had once enjoyed a place among the powers above but had been cast down from that pinnacle on account of his depravity of will and excess of wickedness. So he employed considerable skill so as to pluck the human being from God's favor, render him ungrateful and divest him of all those goods provided for him through God's loving kindness. What did he do? He discovered this wild animal, namely, the serpent, overcoming the other animals by his cunning, as blessed Moses also testified in the words, "The serpent was the wildest of all the beasts on the earth (127a) made by the Lord God." He made use of this creature like some instrument and through it inveigled that naive and weaker vessel, namely, woman, into

2. Gn 3.1.

3. Ps 8.5.

his deception by means of conversation. "The serpent spoke to the woman," the text says.

(4) Consider from this, dearly beloved, how in the beginning none of the wild beasts then existing caused fear either to the man or to the woman; on the contrary, they recognized human direction and dominion, and as with tame animals these days, so then even the wild and savage ones proved to be subdued. But perhaps in this case some may raise a difficulty and seek to find out if the wild animals also shared the power of speech. Not so—perish the thought; rather, people, following Scripture, need to consider the fact that the words came from the devil, who was spurred on to this deception by his own ill-will, while this wild animal he employed like some convenient instrument (127b) so as to be able to set the bait for his own deception and thus upset the woman first of all, being ever more readily susceptible of deception,⁴ and then, through her, man the first-formed. So he employs this irrational animal for laying his plan, and by means of it he speaks to the woman in these words: "Why is it that God said, Do not eat of any tree of the garden?" Notice in this case the extreme subtlety of his malice: in the unfolding of his planning and inquiry he introduces words not spoken by God and acts as though motivated by care for them. This, in fact, is what emerges from his words, "Why is it that God said, Do not eat of any tree in the garden?" As if the evil demon were saying, Why did he deprive you of such enjoyment? Why does he not allow you to share in the good things in the garden instead of granting you the pleasure of looking at them while not permitting you to possess them and (127c) thus gain the greater enjoyment? "Why is it that God said?" What, he is saying, is the reason for this? What is the advantage of life in the gar-

4. Chrysostom's sexism, which is something of a problem for the translator throughout the homilies and is a feature of this second creation story in particular, we have noted in Introduction 14. This present disparaging remark (not supported by the scriptural text, needless to say) begins a trend in the narrative, and betrays also Chrysostom's moralizing tendency that will place Eve at center stage in the account of the Fall. With this, Chrysostom's soul-mate, Paul, for all his bad reputation would not have been pleased.

den when you aren't free to enjoy the things in it, but are even worse off in incurring the more intense pain of having sight of things but missing out on the enjoyment that comes from possessing them?

(5) Do you see how he uses the words like a bait to inject his poison? The woman should have been able from his very approach to recognize the extremity of his frenzy and the fact that he deliberately said what was not the case and made a pretence of care for them as part of his plan so as to be in a position to find out the instructions they had been given by God, and thus lead them to their downfall. So he did not want her to be able to recognize his trickery immediately and thus abandon converse with him as being idle speech and so avoid being dragged down to a low level. After all, there was no need for her (127d) to get involved in conversation with him in the first place; she should rather have conversed with the person for whose sake she came into being, with whom she shared everything on equal terms, and whose helpmate she had been made.

(6) But acting impetuously—how, I know not—she got involved in conversation with the serpent and through him as through an instrument she took in the devil's deadly words; so it ensued that she learnt from the devil's speech the very opposite to the words' real sense, and that whereas the Creator gave one set of directions, the devil said the opposite to the Creator about avoiding him, quitting further conversation with him and having only abhorrence for the creature presuming to sharpen his tongue against the direction given to them. In fact, through her grave negligence she not only failed to turn away but revealed the whole secret of the Lord's direction, thus casting pearls before swine and (128a) fulfilling what was said by Christ: "Don't cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them underfoot, turn on you and tear you to pieces,"⁵ as in fact happened in this case. I mean, she exposed to swine, to that evil beast, that is, to the demon acting through it, the divine pearls; he not only trampled on

5. Mt 7.6.

them and opposed them with his words, but turned and led into the rupture of disobedience not only her but also the first-formed man with her. Such is the evil of idly and casually exposing to all and sundry the divine mysteries. Let those give heed who idly and indiscriminately open their mouths to everyone.

(7) Christ, after all, is not talking about real swine in that verse, but referring to people who behave like swine and, in the manner of animals, roll in the mire of sin; (128b) he thus teaches us to recognize differences in people and look to the propriety of their life style whenever it is necessary to keep secret any of the divine sayings, lest we bring harm on them and ourselves. Such people, after all, not only reap no benefit from what is said, but oftentimes even drag down into the same depths of ruin as themselves those who incautiously offer them these beautiful pearls. Hence we must guard them scrupulously lest we suffer the same fate as those who are deceived in this regard. You see, if in the present instance also the woman had decided not to offer pearls to swine, she would not have fallen into the abyss herself nor dragged her husband down with her.

(8) Let us, however, listen to what she says to him in reply. That is, when he said, "Why is it that God said, Do not eat of any tree of the garden?" (128c) the woman replied to the serpent, "We do eat of every tree of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden God said, Do not eat or even touch it in case you die."⁶ Do you see his malice? He said what was not the case so as to entice her into conversation with him and thus learn what was the case. The woman, you see, is evidently encouraged as though he were kindly disposed to her, and she reveals the whole of the instruction, tells him all in detail, and by her reply deprives herself of any excuse. I mean, what could you say in your defense, woman? "God said, Do not eat of any tree in the garden." You ought to have turned away from the speaker and said to him, Be off, you are a cheat, you do not know the force of the direction given us,

6. Gn 3.2-3.

nor the extent of the enjoyment we have, nor the abundance of good things given us. For your part you said God (128d) has told us to taste nothing of any tree, whereas out of his great goodness the Lord and Creator has permitted us enjoyment and control of them all, bidding us keep away only from one, and this likewise out of great care for us lest we taste it and die. You should, had you been in your right mind, have addressed these words to him, turned away from him utterly, and have had nothing to do with him nor listened to anything said by him.

(9) Instead, however, she revealed the secret of the instruction and told him what God had said to them, and thus received from him a different kind of advice, bringing ruin and death. That is to say, when the woman said, "We do eat of every tree of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden God said, Do not eat or even touch it," that evil creature, enemy of our (129a) salvation, in his turn offered advice at odds with that of the Lord. You see, whereas the loving God had forbidden their tasting that fruit on account of his great care for them lest they be subject to death for their disobedience, that evil creature said to the woman, "You will not truly die."⁷ What kind of excuse could anyone find appropriate to the woman for being prepared to give her complete attention to the creature that spoke with such temerity? I mean, after God said, "Do not touch it lest you die," he said, "You will not truly die." Then, not being satisfied with contradicting the words of God, he goes on to misrepresent the Creator as jealous so as to be in a position to introduce deceit by this means, get the better of the woman and carry out his own purpose. "You will not truly die," he said. "God, you see, knows that on the day that you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, knowing good and evil."⁸ (129b) See all the bait he offered: he filled the cup with a harmful drug and gave it to the woman, who did not want to recognize its deadly character. She could have known this from the outset, had she wanted; instead, she lis-

7. Gn 3.4.

8. Gn 3.5.

tened to his word, that God forbade their tasting the fruit for that reason—"He knows that your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, knowing good from evil"—puffed up as she was with the hope of being equal to God and evidently dreaming of greatness.

(10) Such, after all, are the stratagems of the enemy: whenever he lures someone to a great height through deceit, at that very point he casts them down into a deep abyss. The woman, you see, had dreams of equality with God and hastened to taste the fruit; she had evidently set her mind and her thinking on that goal, and she thought of nothing else than how to drink the cup prepared for her by the wicked demon. That is to say, listen to the account Scripture gives so as to learn that she was bent on this course after receiving that deadly poison through the serpent's advice. (129c) "The woman saw that the tree was good for eating, pleasing for the eyes to behold, and attractive to contemplate. She took some of its fruit and ate it."⁹ True it is that "evil converse corrupts good behavior."¹⁰ Why was it, after all, that before that wicked demon's advice she entertained no such idea, had no eyes for the tree, nor noticed its attractiveness? Because she feared God's direction and the punishment likely to follow from tasting the fruit; now, however, when she was deceived by this evil creature into thinking that not only would they not come to any harm from this but would even be equal to God, then evidently hope of gaining the promised reward drove her to taste it. Not content to remain within her own proper limits, but considering the enemy and foe of her salvation (129d) to be more trustworthy than God's words, she learned shortly afterwards through her own experience the lethal effect of such advice and the disaster brought on them from tasting the fruit. The text says, remember, "She saw the tree was good for eating, pleasing for the eyes to behold and attractive to contemplate," and she reasoned with herself, probably from the devil's deceit which he

9. Gn 3.6, where the LXX's "attractive to contemplate, ripe for contemplation" departs somewhat from a difficult Hebrew phrase.

10. Paul's quotation of Menander's *Thais* at 1 Cor 15.33.

proposed to her through the serpent: If the tree is good for eating, can so delight the eyes and has some indefinable attractiveness about it, while tasting it provides us with the highest esteem, and we will have honor equal to the Creator, why should we not taste it?

(11) Do you see how the devil led her captive, handicapped her reasoning, and caused her to set her thoughts on goals beyond her real capabilities, in order that she might be puffed up with empty hopes (130a) and lose her hold on the advantages already accorded her? "She took some of its fruit," the text says, "and ate it; she gave it to her husband also, and they both ate it. Their eyes were opened, and they realized they were naked."¹¹ O woman, what have you done? You have not only followed that deadly counsel literally and trampled on the law imposed on you by God, spurning his instruction and treating it with such displeasure as to be discontented with such great enjoyment, but you have also presumed to take fruit from the one tree which the Lord bade you not to lay hold of, you put faith in the words of the serpent, you regarded its advice worthy of greater heed than the instruction given you by the Creator, and have been ensnared in such awful deception as to be incapable of any claim to excuse. Surely you're not, after all, of the same nature as the one who offered you the advice? He happened in fact to be one of those under your control, (130b) one of the servants placed by providence under your authority. Such being the case, why did you disgrace yourself, departing from the one for whom you were created, as whose helpmate you were made, in whose dignity you had equal share, one with him in being and one in language—why then did you agree to enter into converse with the serpent, and by means of this creature accept the advice of the devil, which was plainly at variance with the Creator's injunction, without being turned aside from such evil intent, but rather presuming to taste the fruit through hope of what had been promised?

11. Gn 3.6-7 in the LXX rendering, which has both men and women eating together, not man on his own—perhaps accounting for the following diatribe against the woman alone.

(12) Well and good, then: so you cast yourself into such an abyss and robbed yourself of your pre-eminent dignity. Why did you make your husband a partner in this grievous disaster, why prove to be the temptress of the person whose helpmate you were intended to be, and why for a tiny morsel alienate him along with yourself from the favor of God? What excess of folly (130c) led you to such heights of presumption? Wasn't it sufficient for you to pass your life without care or concern, clad in a body yet free of any bodily needs? to enjoy everything in the garden except for one tree? to have all visible things under your own authority and to exercise control over them all? Did you instead, deceived as you were by vain hopes, set your heart on reaching the very pinnacle of power? On that account you will discover through experience itself that not only will you fail to achieve that goal but you will rob yourself and your husband of everything already given you, you will fall into such depths of remorse that you will regret your failed intentions while that wicked demon, responsible for concocting that deadly plan, will mock and insult you for falling victim to him and incurring the same fate as he. I mean, just as he had ideas above his station, (130d) was carried away to a degree beyond what was granted him, and so fell from heaven to earth, in just the same way did you have in mind to proceed, and by your transgression of the command were brought to the punishment of death, giving free rein to your own envy, as some sage has said: "By the devil's envy death entered the world."¹²

(13) Our text says, "She gave it to her husband also, and they both ate it. Their eyes were opened." Great was the man's indifference, too: even though like him she was human and his wife as well, still he should have kept God's law intact and given it preference before her improper greed, and not joined her as a partner in her fall nor deprived himself of such benefits on account of a brief pleasure, offending his benefactor who had also shown him so much loving kindness and had (131a) regaled him with a life so free of pain and relieved of

¹². Wis 2.24.

all distress. After all, were you not free to enjoy everything else in the garden in generous measure? Why did you not choose for yourself to keep the command that was so easy? Instead, you probably listened to the promise contained in the deadly advice coming from your wife, and buoyed up in your turn with hope you readily shared in the food. As a result you incur the penalty from each other, and experience teaches you not to place greater importance on the wicked demon's advice than on God.¹³

(14) "She gave it to her husband also, and they both ate it. Their eyes were opened, and they realized they were naked." At this point an important question arises, which I promised you, my dear people, yesterday to deal with. What I mean is (131b) that someone could ask what particular quality was it which that tree had that resulted in the opening of their eyes from eating it, and why is it called the knowledge of good and evil. Wait a while, if you don't mind: I want to discuss this, too, with you for a moment and teach you, dear people, that, if we wanted to welcome the contents of Sacred Scripture with grateful hearts, nothing of what is said there would seem difficult. What I mean is that it wasn't the eating from the tree that opened their eyes: they could see even before eating. Instead, the eating from this tree was the symptom of their disobedience and the breaking of the command given by God; and through their guilt they consequently divested themselves of the glory surrounding them, rendering themselves unworthy of such wonderful esteem. Hence Scripture takes up the point in its customary way with the words, (131c) "They both ate. Their eyes were opened, and they realized they were naked;" because of the Fall, they were stripped of grace from above, and they felt the sense of their obvious nakedness so that through the shame that overcame them they might know precisely what peril they had been led into by breaking the Lord's command. You see, before this they had enjoyed such

13. Is it chauvinism alone, or Chrysostom's moral purpose so obsessed with Eve's moral behavior, that accounts for Adam's light rebuke? In this case Chrysostom is not at one with Paul, author of Rom 5 and a writer of primarily dogmatic concerns.

confidence and were not aware that they happened to be naked (actually, they were not really naked: the glory from above garbed them better than any garment), whereas after eating—that is, after transgression of what had been commanded—they fell into such baseness that they then looked for some covering through not being able to bear their shame. You see, transgression of the command entered the scene and snatched away that novel and remarkable garment—I mean the glory and favor from above (131d) enveloping them—and it both lent them an awareness of their nakedness and also clad them in unspeakable shame.

(15) “They stitched together fig leaves,” the text goes on, “and made themselves skirts.”¹⁴ Consider, I ask you, dearly beloved, what height they had fallen from and how the devil’s advice had cast them into a deep abyss. Whereas, you see, they had been clothed in such glory, now they stitch together fig leaves and make themselves skirts. This is the advantage to be gained from the devil’s deceit, this is the scope of his advice—not merely to fail to provide greater benefits but to render us naked and devoid of those we have. Since therefore such a pretext of eating led to disobedience, Scripture accordingly says, “They ate, and their eyes were opened,” referring not to the eyes of the senses but to their mental awareness. You see, once they disobeyed (132a) what had been commanded, they were now made to become aware of things that previously they had no awareness of on account of the benevolence of the Lord shown to them. So when you hear that “Their eyes were opened,” understand it in the sense that he saw to it that they would now experience their nakedness and the loss of the glory they enjoyed before eating. To be sure that this is the way with Scripture, listen to what it says elsewhere as well: when Sarah’s maid ran away from service and got lost, she flung her child down next to a log and from a distance she thought about his approaching demise in these words, “God opened the eyes”¹⁵ of Hagar, not because she could not see before then but because he awakened her mind. Do you see

14. Gn 3:7.

15. Gn 21:19.

that the word "opened" refers not to our bodily eyes but to mental awareness?

(16) We would (132b) make the same point in regard to the other question that arises at this stage. That is, they ask, Why was it called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? There are, you see, many people bent on controversy who endeavor to maintain that after eating from the tree Adam had knowledge to discriminate between good and evil—an opinion of the utmost absurdity. I mean, in view of this and foreseeing it earlier, we dealt with many aspects of the intelligence granted the human being by God, demonstrating it from the imposition of names which he gave to all the animals, the birds and the brute beasts, and the fact that he was endowed with prophetic grace along with this ineffable intelligence lest anyone come up with such an opinion. This person, therefore, who both imposed names and gave vent to that so remarkable prophecy about the woman, as we have already mentioned—how could he have been ignorant of what is good (132c) and what is evil? I mean, if we admitted that (God forbid), once again would blasphemous references be directed to the Creator. How, after all, could an ignorant person be commanded that transgression is wrong? This, however, is not the case—perish the thought; on the contrary, he knew quite well. It was, after all, on that account that God from the outset equipped this creature with independence: if this had not been the case, he ought not have been punished when he broke the command nor considered worthy of praise for keeping it. You see, the fact that he fell under death's sway on account of the fall is clear both from the command itself and from what happened later. Listen, in fact, to the woman in person speaking to the serpent: "From fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden," God said, "You are not to eat, lest you die." It follows that before eating they were in fact not subject to death; if this were not the case, he would not have imposed death on them by way of a penalty after the eating.

(17) Who therefore (132d) could bear with those people who insist on saying that the human being had knowledge of good and evil after eating from the tree, that creature who be-

fore such eating was liberally endowed with intelligence, and along with intelligence had been granted also the prophetic gift? How do these two things make sense—on the one hand, knowing goats and sheep and all the species of brute beasts, what vegetation was suitable for food and what was harmful, which types to keep away from sedulously and which ones to approach; and, on the other hand, the idea that the human being, this rational creature, should be unaware of what is good and what is evil? But behold, they say, it was Scripture that called it the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. I know that, too: but if you are prepared to learn the characteristics of Sacred Scripture, you will know why it gave this name to the tree. You see, it wasn't because it supplied knowledge that it is called that, but because (133a) the transgression of the command happened to concern the tree, and from that event knowledge of sin then entered the scene, and shame as well—that was why the name was given. It is, after all, the way with Sacred Scripture to name places from the things that happen, wherever it is they happen. So on this basis Sacred Scripture also named the tree of the knowledge of good and evil since transgression and observance of the command concerned the tree.

(18) The loving Lord, you see, instructing the human being in the beginning and from the very outset, and wanting to teach him that he has a creator and craftsman who produces all visible realities and shapes him as well, wished to reveal to him his own dominion through this slight command. To make a comparison with a generous master who provides a great home full of wonders for someone's enjoyment: (133b) he is prepared to take not the due price but some small part so as in his own interests to protect his title of dominion and to ensure that the person may have precise understanding that he is not owner of the property but enjoys its use out of his grace and beneficence. In just the same way does our Lord entrust everything to the human being, providing him with a way of life in the garden and enjoyment of everything in it; lest he be gradually perverted in his thinking and come to regard visible things as self-sufficient and get inflated ideas of his own im-

portance, he bids him stay away from the one tree, setting a severe penalty for transgression so that he may be aware he is under his dominion and along with everything else is a partaker of his generosity. Since, however, he was guilty of great inadvertence and together with his wife (133c) fell into this disaster through transgression of the command given him by tasting of the tree, accordingly it called it the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—not because he was ignorant of good and evil before this (he was, after all, not so ignorant, since his wife in conversation with the serpent said, “God said, Do not eat of it lest you die,” so that he knew death was the penalty for breaking the command), but because after eating it they were divested of the glory from above and also had experience of their obvious nakedness. This was the reason it called it the knowledge of good and evil, since in connection with it there took place the contest, as you might say, between obedience and disobedience.

(19) Have you discovered why it said, “Their eyes were opened, and they realized they were naked”? Do you know why (133d) the tree is called the knowledge of good and evil? Consider, after all, how much shame they were eventually seized with after eating it and thus breaking the Lord’s command: “They stitched fig leaves together, and made themselves skirts.” See the depths of indignity into which they fell from a condition of such great glory. Those who previously passed their life like angels on earth contrive covering for themselves out of fig leaves. Such is the evil that sin is: not only does it deprive us of grace from above, but it also casts us into deep shame and abjection, strips us of goods already belonging to us, and deprives us of all confidence.

(20) But in case we make this sermon completely melancholy by going on and on about this sin that consisted of eating of the tree and of the disobedience overwhelming the human being, come now, if you don’t mind, (134a) let us change the topic from the tree to that other one, from this tree to the tree of the Cross, and let us see what harm the former caused and what good the latter introduced. Rather, it was not the tree that caused the harm, but slothful will and contempt dis-

played for God's command. The former tree brought death, death entering the scene after the Fall, remember, whereas the latter endowed us with immortality; one drove us from paradise, the other led us up to heaven; the former rendered Adam liable to such a terrible penalty for one transgression, whereas the latter freed us from the countless burdens of our sins and restored to us confidence in the Lord's sight.¹⁶ Do you see the difference between the one tree and the other? do you see the devil's malice, man's indifference, and the Lord's loving kindness? Accordingly, let us arm ourselves, I beg you, dear people, with the armor of this lifegiving tree, (134b) and in its power let us do to death deadly passions, as the Apostle also instructs us in these words: "Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and lusts."¹⁷ What he means is this: people giving themselves completely to Christ have crucified every improper desire affecting the flesh and risking impairment to the soul's whole vitality. Let us too imitate these people and put our bodies on the alert against the tyranny imposed on us by the devil's activity so that even in this present life we may cross this rough and dangerous ocean serenely, put in to the calm haven of God's love, and be deemed worthy to attain the good things promised to those who love him, in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, now and forever, for ages of ages. Amen. (134c)

16. It is precisely this sort of dogmatic study of the Fall, dear to Paul, that is conspicuously missing from Chrysostom's moral treatment; so after a few sentences he lapses again into moral consideration.

17. Gal 5.24.

HOMILY 17

*"They heard the sound of the Lord God as he strolled
in the garden in the evening."*¹

WE HAVE SAID ENOUGH, I would think, as far as our abilities lie, in giving our explanation lately of the tree, to teach you, dearly beloved, what was the reason why Sacred Scripture called it the knowledge of good and evil. So today I want to proceed to what follows, so that you may learn God's unspeakable love and the degree of considerateness he employs in his care for our race. Everything, you see, he made and arranged so that this rational being created by him had the good fortune to be of the greatest importance, and far from being in any way inferior to the life of the angels, enjoyed in the body their immunity from suffering.

(2) When, however, he saw them both through negligence transgress the commands he had given them, despite the warnings he had conveyed by threatening them (134d) and putting them more on the alert, he did not stop loving them at that point. Instead, faithful to his own goodness, he is like a loving father who sees his own son through negligence committing things unworthy of his upbringing and being reduced from his eminent position to the utmost depravity: he is stirred to the depths of his being as a father, yet, far from ceasing to care for him, he displays further concern for him in his desire to extricate him gradually from his abasement and return him to his previous position of dignity. Well, in just the same way does the good God, too, have pity on man for the plot to which he fell victim with his wife after being deceived and accepting the devil's advice through the serpent. Like a

1. Gn 3.8.

doctor treating a sick and suffering patient confined to bed, who needs much healing and the doctor's attention, he goes immediately to his side.

(3) In order, however, that you may learn (135a) God's ineffable considerateness, from the words themselves you must listen to the reading. "They heard the sound of the Lord God," the text says, "as he strolled in the garden in the evening; both Adam and his wife hid from the Lord's presence amongst the trees of the garden." Let us not, dearly beloved, pass heedlessly by the words from Sacred Scripture, nor remain at the level of their expression, but consider that the ordinariness of their expression occurs with our limitations in mind and that everything is done in a manner befitting God for the sake of our salvation.² I mean, tell me this: were we prepared to follow the drift of the words without taking what is said in a sense befitting God, how could many absurdities be avoided? See now, let us consider this from the very beginning of the reading: "They heard the sound (135b) of the Lord God," the text says, "as he strolled in the garden in the evening, and they hid." What are you saying—God strolls? Are we assigning feet to him? Have we no exalted conception of him? No, God doesn't stroll—perish the thought: how could he, present as he is everywhere and filling everything with his presence? Can he, for whom heaven is his throne and earth his footstool, be confined to the garden? What right-minded person could say this?

(4) So what is the meaning of this statement, "They heard the sound of the Lord God as he strolled in the garden in the evening"? He wanted to provide them with such an experience as would induce in them a state of anguish, which in fact happened: they had so striking an experience that they tried to hide from the presence of God. Sin, you see, appeared and

2. For an Antiochene like Chrysostom, anthropomorphism represented a particular challenge to the delicate balance of the two correlatives to his theology of the Word—divine transcendence and considerateness for human limitations. This particularly striking example of anthropomorphism of Gn 3.8 illustrated the latter eminently, but Chrysostom urges his congregation not to take it so simplistically as to impugn that other factor, the transcendence of the divine author.

transgression, and they were covered in confusion. After all, that incorruptible judge—conscience, I mean—in taking a stand against the accused (135c) cried out in unmistakable tones, levelled its accusation, brought forward evidence, and as if before their very eyes wrote down details of their sins in all their magnitude. For this reason, you see, the loving Lord from on high, in forming human beings right from the beginning, implanted conscience in them as a tireless accuser, proof against dissuasion and deception at any time.

(5) Even if someone were able to escape the notice of all human beings in committing sin and perpetrating improper conduct, he could not escape that accuser; he would go his wicked way with this accuser ever present within him to trouble him, tear at him and flay him, never resting, be it in public, in company, at table, sleeping or rising, demanding justice for felonies committed, bringing into focus the impropriety of sin (135d) and the punishment due to it. Like a skilful physician it does not cease from applying its remedies; and should it find itself rebuffed, it does not take no for an answer but continues its ministrations unremittingly. This, after all, is its role, to make memory proof against dissuasion and not permit us to lay our sins to rest but keep them in focus so that even by this means it may make us reluctant to fall into the same ones again. You see, if we find an ally in conscience and get assistance from it as the forthright accuser innate within us, our scourge, tearing at our vitals, bringing more weight to bear on us than a public executioner, and yet in many cases we still fall victims to our indifference, to what extremes would we not be taken if we were deprived of such assistance?

(6) This, then, is the reason why (136a) in the present case the first-formed human being immediately hides on receiving this impression and realizing the presence of the Lord. Why so, tell me? Because he saw that stern accuser—conscience, I mean—taking his position against him. He had no one else as prosecutor and witness of his felonies with the sole exception of the one that he carried around within him. They were, however, taught through their nakedness the magnitude of

the sins they had committed by the removal of the glory that had previously draped them like a garment, as well as by the accusation of conscience. So since they were covered in confusion after that grievous sin, they tried to hide. "They heard the sound of the Lord God," the text says, "as he strolled in the garden in the evening; both Adam and his wife hid from the Lord's presence in the middle of the garden."

(7) Nothing is worse than sin, dearly beloved: once it appears (136b) it not merely fills us with shame but also robs of their senses people previously sensible and full of great intelligence. I mean, consider, I ask you, the depth of folly now displayed by this person previously endowed with intelligence, who had demonstrated the intelligence granted him in the actions he performed, and who had given vent to such inspired utterances. "Hearing the sound of the Lord God," the text says, "as he strolled in the garden in the evening, he and his wife hid from the Lord's presence amongst the trees of the garden." What depths of folly does this not reveal—for this man to endeavor to hide from the God who is present everywhere, the Creator who brings all things from non-being into being, who knows things that lie hidden, who alone fashions people's hearts and understands all their works,³ who tests hearts and minds,⁴ who understands the movements of our heart?⁵ (136c) But do not wonder, dearly beloved. For that is the nature of sinners. Even if they are not able to hide, they try earnestly to hide. That you may know that they did this because they had been denuded of their glory, unable to endure the shame which enveloped them after their sin, consider where they hid themselves: In the midst of paradise. Just like heedless slaves and ones due for a whipping, when they are unable to hide from their master, try to run hither and thither into the corners of the house when their minds are shaking with fear, likewise these two ran around in that abode, that is in Paradise, but without finding any escape.

(8) It is not without purpose, however, that the time is speci-

3. Ps 33.15.

5. Cf. Ps 43.22.

4. Ps 7.9.

fied: "They heard the sound of the Lord God," the text says, remember, "as he strolled in the garden in the evening." The purpose was for you to learn the Lord's loving kindness, that he didn't postpone action in the slightest; instead, once he saw what had happened and sized up the gravity of the ulcer, he at once set in motion the healing process (136d) lest the ulcer spread and open up an incurable wound. So he moved to catch it at an early stage and at once took action against the spread of the ulcer, not for a moment leaving the victim deprived of his prompt attention, out of fidelity to his own goodness. What I mean is that the enemy of our salvation had displayed such rage in his unfailing envy of our advantages that he concocted his plot from the very beginning and, through his disastrous advice, he robbed those two of their wonderful way of life. But God, ever anxious to try something new, watching over our affairs in his wisdom, saw, on the one hand, the malice practiced by the devil and, on the other hand, the man's negligence, which was the means of covering him in such shame once he had been prevailed on by his wife; so God takes his position as a gentle and loving judge presiding over a tribunal that causes fear and trembling, and conducts his examination in detail—teaching us through this approach not (137a) to condemn our fellows before we have conducted a detailed examination.

(g) So let us listen, if you don't mind, to the questions the judge asks, what replies the accused make, the severity of the sentence they receive, and the extent of the condemnation judged appropriate for the one who delivered such dreadful advice to them. Keep your mind alert, I beg you, and with great trepidation heed what is said. After all, we watch an earthly judge seated on his lofty tribunal summoning the accused into the court, flailing them and inflicting other punishments on them, and in much trembling we insist on standing by to hear what the judge says and the accused in his turn replies. So much the more in this case is it proper that we should do this, watching the Creator of our race doing justice to those created by him. If, however, (137b) you attend with precision, you will see how great is the difference between God's

loving kindness and human beings' severity towards their fellows.

(10) "The Lord God called Adam and said to him, 'Adam, where are you?'"⁶ From the very enquiry it behooves us to marvel at God's surpassing love, not so much that he called him, but that he personally called him—something human beings would never stoop to in the case of their fellows who share the same nature with themselves. I mean, you know that when they take their seat on the lofty tribunal and do justice to those guilty of felonies, they don't consider the accused worthy of having a reply made in their own person; consequently, they let them see how much disrepute they have incurred through committing these crimes. While the judge makes his response somebody else stands up and relays the words of the judge to the accused, and in turn reports his words to the judge. (137c) Such you would see to be the practice of judges the world over. With God, however, this is not the case. Instead? He calls personally: "The Lord God called Adam," the text says, "and said to him, 'Adam, where are you?'"

(11) See how much force lies concealed in this brief expression. You see, the very act of calling is a mark of great love beyond all telling, as it is a mark of great goodness to give an opportunity of reply to the accused in his shame, who dares not open his mouth or loosen his tongue. Yet, along with this loving kindness, the question, "'Where are you?'" is also very telling. In other words, it is as if he hinted to him in these words, What has happened? I left you in one condition, whereas now I find you in another; I left you clad in glory, whereas now I find you in nakedness.

(12) "'Where are you?'" How did this happen to you? Who has brought you to this changed condition? (137d) What kind of robber and brigand has robbed you like this in an instant of all the substance of your wealth and cast you into such indigence? Whence has come the nakedness you are experiencing? Who is responsible for depriving you of that wonderful

6. Gn 3.9.

garment you had the good fortune to wear? What is this sudden transformation? What tempest has all at once in this way sunk all your precious cargo? What has happened to make you try to hide yourself from the one who has been so kind to you and placed you in a position of such importance? Who is it you are now endeavoring to avoid through fear? Surely, after all, no one has cause to accuse you? Surely, after all, no witnesses are testifying against you? Whence comes the fear and dread that overwhelms you? "I heard the sound," the text says, "'as you walked in the garden, I was afraid because I am naked, and I hid.'"⁷ Whence comes the knowledge of your nakedness? Tell me: what is new and surprising? Who could ever have told you of this, (138a) unless you have become the guilty cause of your own shame, unless you have eaten from that one tree I told you not to eat from?

(13) See the Lord's loving kindness and the surpassing degree of his long-suffering. I mean, though being in a position to begrudge such a great sinner the right of reply and rather than to consign him at once to the punishment he had determined on in anticipation of his transgressing, he shows patience and withholds action: he asks a question, receives a reply, and questions him further as if inviting him to excuse himself so that he might seize the opportunity to display his characteristic love in regard to the sinner even despite his fall. He thus teaches us through this instance as well when we judge the guilty not to berate them harshly or display the savagery of wild beasts in their regard, but rather employ much long-suffering and mercy inasmuch as we are dispensing justice to our own members, and out of a sense of kinship we should temper justice with love. (138b) After all, it is not without purpose that Sacred Scripture employs such great consideration; instead, through the concreteness of the expressions it both teaches us God's loving kindness and promotes our emulation so that we may imitate as far as human capacity allows the goodness of the Lord. "He said to him, 'Who told you that you are naked—unless you have eaten from that one

7. Gn 3.10.

tree I told you not to eat from?"⁸ Where could you have got the knowledge of this, he says, and be covered in such confusion, unless you have been so intemperate as to despise my command?

(14) Notice, dearly beloved, the excess of God's goodness, how, in this manner of one friend communing with another and remonstrating with him over transgression of his instructions, he enters into dialog with Adam. "Who told you that you are naked—unless you have eaten from that one tree I told you not to eat from?" (138c) Even the phrase, "that one tree," bears a slight nuance: Surely I didn't inhibit your enjoyment? it is saying. Did I not relieve you of every need, give you authority over everything in the garden, and only instruct you to keep away from that one thing so that you might be in a position to know that you are subject to direction and required to show some obedience? So what kind of terrible indifference is this that, despite your having such great enjoyment, you could not bear to keep away from that one thing but rather hastened in that manner to violate the command given you by me and envelop yourself in so many excesses?

(15) What good was that to you? Hadn't I warned you of that in advance? Wasn't it my intention to check you beforehand with fear of punishment and so make you more cautious? Didn't I tell you what would be likely to happen? Didn't I for that reason forbid your eating that fruit so that you wouldn't fall victim to those faults? Who could consider you deserving of excuse now that you've proved to be so unresponsive despite so many directions? (138d) Didn't I thus instruct you in every detail, like a father to his own dear son, and teach you to keep away from this tree while being free to taste all the others lest it wreak havoc with all your endowments?

(16) Perhaps, however, you have thought advice from another quarter acceptable and to be preferred to my command, and followed it in the expectation of gaining greater

8. Gn 3.11—with some slight anacoluthon smoothed over in other LXX manuscripts.

advantages, and out of scorn for my command you were bold enough to eat from the tree. See what you suffered through that experiment: you discovered the disastrous effect of that advice. Do you see the loving kindness of the judge? Do you see his mildness and long-suffering? Do you see his consideration stretching beyond all thought and imagination? Do you see how through his question and the words, "Who told you that you are naked—unless you have eaten from that one tree I told you not to eat from?" he wanted to open to you the doors to excuse so that even in regard to such a sinful person (139a) he might show his characteristic love? So let us listen to the accused as well, and hear what he has to say in reply to this question.

(17) "Adam said," the text goes on, "The woman you gave me as my companion gave me fruit from the tree and I ate it."⁹ Pitiable words and full of much pity, and capable of moving the Lord to clemency, He who is so gentle, overcoming our sins by his goodness. For when he had shaken his disposition by a great display of tolerance and had shown him the magnitude of his sin, Adam all but preparing his own defense, said to Him, "the woman you gave me as my companion." (139b) In other words, how could I have ever expected that I would have been so covered in confusion through the one you created with the very purpose of bringing me consolation from her person? You gave her to me, you led her to meet me. She—I know not under what impulse—in her turn gave me fruit from the tree and I ate it.

(18) While this explanation seems to offer some excuse, it is in fact devoid of all defense. I mean, what defense can you lay claim to, he says, for forgetting my commands and judging the bauble given by your wife more important than words spoken by me? After all, even if your wife did give it to you, still my command and the fear of punishment were sufficient to dispose you to avoid tasting. I mean, surely you were not ignorant? Surely you weren't unaware? With this in mind, out

of care for you, I spoke up with the aim of preventing your falling victim to these faults; and so, even if your wife prepared the way for your transgressing my command, nevertheless you were not without guilt: you should have regarded (139c) my command as more worthy of trust, and, beyond dissuading yourself alone from eating, you should have demonstrated the gravity of the sin to your wife as well. After all, you are head of your wife,¹⁰ and she has been created for your sake; but you have inverted the proper order: not only have you failed to keep her on the straight and narrow but you have been dragged down with her, and whereas the rest of the body should follow the head, the contrary has in fact occurred, the head following the rest of the body, turning things upside down. Hence, since you have reversed the proper order completely, you now find yourself in that desperate situation after being clad previously in such wonderful splendor. So who could adequately lament the loss you have sustained of such great benefits?

(19) But, all the same, even if all these things have befallen you, put the blame on no one else but yourself and your own neglect; after all, if you had not been willing, your wife would have been unable to bring you to this disastrous state. I mean, surely she didn't urge you? Surely she didn't inveigle you? Surely she didn't deceive you? She merely gave (139d) you the fruit, and in an instant with such ease you were prevailed upon to taste it, without a thought to my command; instead, you thought you had been taken in by me and had not been permitted this food for this reason, lest you happen upon greater blessings. What grounds would you have for thinking you were deceived by me, the donor of such acts of kindness to you? What great kindness did this indicate, to take early precautions and clearly outline what you must abstain from so as not to fall into the excesses in which you have now immersed yourself? All these warnings, however, you gave no heed to, and so, behold, you have found out for yourself by

10. Cf. 1 Cor 11:3.

experience the seriousness of these sins; so at this point don't lay the blame on your wife alone, but on your own indifference as well.

(20) Accordingly, when he had addressed himself at sufficient length to Adam, and the latter made excuses for his sins by transferring, as he thought, the guilt to his wife, behold (140a) the good Lord, how much considerateness he employs again and deems her also worthy of a response from him: "God said to the woman," the text goes on, "What is this you have done?"¹¹ You heard your husband, he says, transferring the responsibility to you and putting all the blame on you, given to him though you were as his helpmate and created for the purpose of providing him with comfort from your person inasmuch as you have the same being as he and share in the same nature. So why did you do this, O woman? For what reason did you become the cause of such dreadful shame to yourself and your husband? What advantage did you gain from such intemperance? What benefit came to you from the deception which you willingly embraced and made your husband sharer in? So what did the woman reply? "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." See her overcome by great fear and making excuses for her sins: (140b) just as her husband seemed to transfer the blame to his wife in the words, "My wife brought it and gave it to me and I ate it," so she too, finding no way out admits what happened and says, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." That evil creature, she says, brought that disaster upon us, his baleful advice led us to that shame, he deceived me and I ate.

(21) Don't pass these words by heedlessly, dearly beloved; instead, let us study them precisely and gain much benefit from them. I mean, a tribunal is a fearful thing, capable of arousing terror, and we must listen carefully to everything and lay up in our minds the great treasure to be gained from what is said. That is to say, notice the man also saying, "The woman you gave me as my companion gave it to me, and I ate it." No evidence of force, no evidence of pressure—only

11. Gn 3.13.

choice and decision: (140c) simply "gave," not "forced" or "pressured." She in turn in making her excuse didn't say, The serpent forced me and I ate. Instead, what? "The serpent deceived me." She had the choice of being deceived or not being deceived. "The serpent deceived me," she said. In other words, the enemy of our salvation, working through that evil creature, brought forward his advice and deceived her—not forcing or pressuring but through his deadly advice putting his deception into effect after finding the woman easily disposed to embrace the deception and thus deprived of any excuse.

(22) "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." Notice, moreover, the good Lord is satisfied with their words and doesn't oblige them to say any more. You see, since he was not unaware of the truth when he asked them, but rather knew, and knew very well, (140d) he shows considerateness for their limitations so as to demonstrate his own loving kindness, and he invites them to make admission of their faults. Hence he asks them nothing further. After all, of course, it was necessary to unmask the kind of deception; but to show us that his questioning did not arise from ignorance, he is satisfied with their words. The woman, remember, in saying, "The serpent deceived me and I ate," hinted at that deadly advice which she had accepted from the devil, namely, You will be like gods after eating it. Did you notice how precisely Adam was questioned? With how much long-suffering the woman also was brought before the tribunal? How each of them made their excuse? Now, then, consider in this passage the surpassing degree of the Judge's ineffable love: when the woman said, "The serpent deceived me and I ate," he doesn't then grant the serpent a reply, nor (141a) give it opportunity for excuse, nor question it as he did the man and woman; instead, he accepts the excuses from them and turns on that creature as the guilty party in all the evils.¹² Since, from his being God, and

12. The risk of Antiochene accent on the literal becoming literalist and failing to acknowledge the figurative character of passages such as these seems to be realized in Chrysostom's commentary on these verses. See Introduction 16.

therefore knowing secret things, he was aware that the serpent was the means of achieving the devil's advice and his envy shown in regard to human beings, his purpose was for you to discover his goodness in the way he addressed himself in their case (despite his knowledge of the facts), to Adam, on the one hand, in the words, "Where are you? Who told you you are naked?" and, on the other hand, to the woman in the words, "Why did you do it?" whereas in the case of this evil creature he did nothing of the sort. What did he say to him? "The Lord God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this.'" Do you see the difference? While he said to the woman, "Why have you done it?", to the serpent he said, "Because you have done it." Because you have perpetrated this wickedness, he says, because you have adduced this deadly advice, because you have ministered to such envy, because you have whetted your hatred (141b) for this creature of mine, "Accursed are you beyond all the beasts and all the wild animals of the earth. Upon your belly shall you grovel and slide, and eat dirt all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He shall watch for your head, and you shall watch for his heel."¹³

(23) Notice in this passage, I ask you, the order and sequence illustrating God's loving kindness. I mean, he began directing his enquiries to the man, and then turned his attention to the woman. When she mentioned who was the cause of her fall, he turned to the serpent: not deeming him worth a reply, he sentenced him to his punishment and extended it for all time; in the person of the serpent a lasting instruction was provided for everyone in future never again to accept that deadly (141c) advice nor be deceived by stratagems devised by him.

(24) Perhaps, however, someone may say: if the devil worked

13. Gn 3.14-15. The precise nature of the curse in v.14 emerges not so much from the vocabulary and syntax (which in the Heb. leads Speiser to suggest a translation "banned from" rather than "accursed beyond," and in Chrysostom's LXX is still no clearer) as from the physical effects mentioned in the second half of the verse, as Chrysostom himself comments on below (Migne 142B), where the LXX somewhat embroiders the Heb.

through the serpent to deliver his advice, why was such punishment inflicted on that reptile? This happened as an example of God's loving kindness beyond all telling: just as a loving father punishes the man who killed his own son, and destroys the sword and dagger by which he committed the murder, smashing them into many pieces, in just the same way the good God, too, sentenced this creature to an eternal punishment, when like some sword, he served the purpose of the devil's villainy so that we might reason from this evident and visible punishment to the depths of dishonor in which the devil also found himself. After all, if this creature who played the part of an instrument suffered such frustration, what kind of punishment is it likely that the devil received?

(25) To be more accurate, however, we have already been instructed in this (141d) by Christ when he spoke through the holy Gospels to those standing at his left hand: "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels."¹⁴ In other words, this fate has been prepared for him from ages past, and that unquenchable fire awaits him. So what could be more pitiful than the fate of those people who on account of neglect of their own salvation make themselves liable to that punishment prepared for that demon? You see, for proof that the kingdom has been prepared for us if we are willing to give evidence of virtue and follow the laws laid down by Christ, listen further to his words: "Come, blessed of my Father: inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."¹⁵ Do you see the unquenchable fire prepared for the demon, on the one hand, and for us, on the other hand, the kingdom, provided our resolve does not fail?

(26) Accordingly, let us keep these things in mind and give heed to our way of living, (142a) avoiding evil and never falling victim to the devil's wiles. On the contrary, with good will and no slackening of effort let us keep before our eyes the punishment inflicted on the serpent so that we may hasten towards the goal of our judgment and see the greatness of God's

14. Mt 25.41.

15. Ib.34.

loving kindness. To draw a comparison: it often happens that when people notice a judge exercising his duties and sentencing the accused, they stay there for the whole day and don't leave until they see the judge rise. Much more should we in this instance watch the good God with greater enthusiasm to see how he imposes that severe penalty on the serpent, on the one hand, for the purpose of providing us, by the means of this corporeal creature which that wicked demon had used like some instrument, with an impression of the punishment the demon was due to receive; and how, on the other hand, in his clemency he imposes a due penalty on the woman and the man (142b)—or an admonition rather than a punishment—with the purpose of our observing everything precisely and marvelling at the concern of the loving God shown in regard to our nature.

(27) So what does the text say? "The Lord God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, accursed are you beyond all the beasts and all the wild animals of the earth. Upon your belly shall you grovel and slide, and eat dirt all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He shall watch for your head, and you shall watch for his heel.'" His anger is profound and intense, since profound also was the excess of the deception which the evil demon brought into play through that creature. "The Lord God said to the serpent, (142c) 'Because you have done this.'" Because you were the means of such villainy, he is saying, and put the deception into effect in this way by adducing the deadly advice and mixing the lethal potion; because you did this and intended to expel from my favor those creatures of mine, ministering to the purpose of that evil demon who had been cast down from heaven to earth for his envy and overweening arrogance—hence, because he used you as his instrument in these exploits, I inflict unrelenting punishment on you, so that from what has befallen you he, too, may be in a position to know the extent of the punishment awaiting him, and that human beings to come may be instructed never to fall victim to his counsels nor give rein to his deceit lest they incur the same penalties. On this account

you are accursed beyond all the wild animals since you did not employ your cunning as you ought, (142d) instead, the superiority over all the other animals that you enjoyed proved to be the cause of all these evils for you. "The serpent," the text says, remember, "was the most cunning of all the beasts and wild animals of the earth."¹⁶ Hence you have become accursed beyond all the beasts and the wild animals of the earth.

(28) Since, however, the curse was not perceptible to the senses nor visible to the naked eye, he accordingly inflicts on him a visible punishment so that we may have continually before our eyes reminders of his punishment to contemplate. "Upon your belly shall you grovel and slide, and eat dirt all the days of your life," because you took advantage of your physical form improperly, he is saying, even presuming to enter into conversation with the being I had created as rational. So just as the devil who worked through you, employing you as his instrument, had been cast down from heaven for setting his ambitions above his station, well, (143a) in just the same way I direct that you too assume a different physical shape, slide upon the earth and have that diet, so that in future you won't be able to look upwards; instead, it will be your lot ever to be in this lowly position, and unlike all the other animals eat dirt. And not only this, but "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed." I'm not even content with this, that you slide on the earth: I will make the woman your implacable enemy, and not simply her, but her seed as well I will cause to be perpetually at odds with your seed. "He will watch for your head, and you will watch for his heel." That is to say, I will supply him with such force that he will constantly threaten your head, whereas you will be trodden under his feet.

(29) Sec, dearly beloved, (143b) by means of the punishment against this creature, the extent of the care he reveals to us that he has for the human race. So much is evident even in regard to the serpent perceptible to our senses; yet it is also possible to anyone interested to study the sequel to this in

16. Gn 3.1.

what is written, and to know that if this is the story of the serpent that is visible, much more should the words be understood to refer also to the serpent perceptible only to the mind. I mean, this latter he also humbled and put under our feet, and caused us to trample on his head. Does he not indicate this to us in the words, "Walk on serpents and scorpions"¹⁷? Then, lest we think these words refer to material serpents, he added, "and on all the power of the Enemy." Do you observe from the punishment inflicted on the devil's instrument God's exceeding love?

(30) Let us turn again, if you don't mind, to the woman. You see, since (143c) it was the serpent that was the cause of the deception, accordingly he was the first to incur punishment; and since he deceived her first, and she then dragged her husband down with her, she is punished first, receiving that punishment which carries with it lengthy admonition: "He said to the woman: 'I will greatly aggravate the pain of your labor, in pain you will bear children; your yearning will be for your husband, and he will be your master.'"¹⁸ See the Lord's goodness, how much mildness he employs despite such a terrible fall. "I will greatly aggravate the pain of your labor." My intention had been, he is saying, for you to have a life free of trouble and distress, rid of all pain and grief, filled with every pleasure and with no sense of bodily needs despite your bodily condition. But since you misused such indulgence, (143d) and the abundance of good things led you into such ingratitude, accordingly I impose this curb on you to prevent your further running riot, and I sentence you to painful labor. "I will greatly aggravate the pain of your labor, in pain you will bear children."

(31) I will ensure, he is saying, that the generation of children, a reason for great satisfaction, for you will begin with pain so that each time without fail you will personally have a reminder, through the distress and the pain of each birth, of the magnitude of this sin of disobedience, and may not in the

17. Lk 10.19.

18. Gn 3.16.

course of time allow the event to slip into oblivion, but may be enabled to realize that the deception was the cause of these ills. Hence "I will greatly aggravate the pain of your labor, in pain you will bear children." In this passage he refers to the pangs of labor and in that great distress there is no avoiding (144a) carrying the child all those months like some load, feeling each twinge of pain that is caused by that, the twitching of its limbs, and the unbearable pangs known only to those who go through the experience.

(32) Nevertheless, however, the loving God offered comfort with the pain, so that the satisfaction of bearing the child equally matched those pangs that tortured the womb all those months. I mean, women who are subjected to such distress, are so tormented by the bouts of pain, and, so to say, even despair of life itself, enjoy after the birth satisfaction even in their distress: as though forgetting all that has happened, they give themselves again to the bearing of children, according to the loving God's providence for the maintenance of human beings' welfare. You see, the expectation of future benefits (144b) makes us always bear the distress of the present time with ease.

(33) You would see this trial affecting travellers as well, as they cross the mighty oceans and put up with shipwreck and pirates; despite those many dangers and the disappointment of their hopes they in no way give up, but rather press on towards the same goal. The same thing can be said also of farmers: when they dig deep furrows, till the earth with great care and sow the seed liberally, there frequently occurs drought or flooding, or at the conclusion of the harvesting rust descends on the crop and they lose hope; yet they still don't give up at this point, but when better times come they resume their farming. (144c) And you would find this happening in the case of every occupation.

(34) Well, in just the same way, woman too, in her turn, despite all those months, despite the unspeakable pains, despite the sleepless nights, despite the twitching of limbs, or through some slight accident she gives birth prematurely to the child

in an undeveloped state and unrecognizable, or if fully developed yet handicapped, or unhealthy, or even in many cases stillborn, scarcely escaping risk to her own life—yet despite all this she puts up with the same trouble again, as though oblivious of all these pangs, and she undergoes the same process again. Why do I say the same process? Often it happens that the woman dies with the child, yet this event does not worry other women or induce them to avoid the experience—such being the pleasure and satisfaction God has combined together with the pains.¹⁹

(35) Hence he said, “I will greatly aggravate the pain of your labor, in pain you will bear children.” This is what Christ also talked about with his disciples, showing them the intensity of the pain and the great degree of satisfaction, when he said, “A woman in labor suffers for the reason that her time has come;” (144d) then, wanting to bring home to us how the element of suffering is suddenly removed whereas its place is taken by joy and happiness, he said, “But when she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the distress for joy that a human being has been born into the world.”²⁰ Do you see the exceeding care? Do you see punishment accompanied by admonition? “In pain you will bear children;” then, “Your yearning will be for your husband, and he will be your master.”

(36) As if to explain his reasons to the woman, the loving God said this, meaning, In the beginning I created you equal in esteem to your husband, and my intention was that in everything you would share with him as an equal, and as I entrusted control of everything to your husband, so did I to you; but you abused your equality of status. Hence I subject you to your husband: “Your yearning will be for your husband, and he will be your master.” Because you abandoned your equal, who was sharer with you in the same nature (145a) and for whom you were created, and you chose to enter into conversa-

19. For all Chrysostom's sexism, he is not insensitive to the female condition and can write feelingly of it.

20. Jn 16.21.

tion with that evil creature the serpent, and to take the advice he had to give, accordingly I now subject you to him in future and designate him as your master for you to recognize his lordship, and since you did not know how to rule, learn well how to be ruled. “Your yearning will be for your husband, and he will be your master.” It is better that you be subject to him and fall under his lordship than that enjoying freedom and authority, you would be cast into the abyss. It would be more useful also for a horse to carry the bit and travel under direction than without this to fall down a cliff. Accordingly, considering what is advantageous, I want you to have yearning for him and, like a body being directed by its head, to recognize his lordship pleasurably.

(37) I know that you are wearied by (145b) the excess of words, but stir yourselves a little, I beseech you, lest we leave the sentence incomplete and depart while the judge is still sitting. We are in fact close to the end now. So let us see what he says to the man after the woman, and what kind of punishment he inflicts on him. “Whereas to Adam he said: ‘Because you listened to your wife’s words and ate from this one tree I told you not to eat from, accursed shall be the soil as you till it. In pain may you eat from it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles let it yield you, and you are to eat the grass of the field. In the sweat of your brow may you eat your bread until you return to the soil whence you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you are to return.’”²¹ Great is the (145c) Lord’s care and beyond all telling displayed here for the human being—but let us listen precisely to each word spoken. “Whereas to Adam he said: ‘Because you listened to your wife’s words and ate from this one tree I told you not to eat from.’” Since you listened to your wife, he is saying, and ate from the tree, and put the advice from her ahead of my command and weren’t prepared to keep away from this one single tree which I told you not to eat from (surely, after all, I didn’t bid you keep away from many? one only, and yet you couldn’t

21. Gn 3.17–19, with a particular nuance—or misreading—by the LXX in “as you till it,” which Chrysostom naturally retains.

keep away from that, but forgot my commands and were overborne by your wife). Hence you are to learn through your very labors how much evil you have committed.

(38) Let men give good heed, let women give good heed—the former, that they may have nothing to do with those people advising evil actions, and the latter, that they may advise nothing of the sort. (145d) I mean, if Adam shifted the blame on to his wife and was still considered incapable of any excuse, what kind of defense could anyone offer in the claim, “It was on account of my wife that I sinned in this way and that, and committed this sin and that”? After all, the reason that she came under your dominion and you were declared her master was that she should follow your lead, not for the head to follow the feet. Frequently, however, it is possible to see the opposite occurring, that the one who is supposed to be in the position of head doesn’t even keep to the position of the feet, whereas she who is in the position of the feet is installed in the position of head. Hence also blessed Paul, the world’s teacher, foresaw all this and cried out, “How, after all, can you be sure, wife, whether you will save your husband? And how can you be sure, husband, whether you will save your wife?”²² Still, let a husband be very much on his guard so as to resist his wife’s inducement to harmful behavior, and let a wife (146a) keep fresh in mind the punishment Eve received for plying her husband with harmful advice, and not presume to offer such advice nor imitate Eve, but rather bring him to his senses by her example and encourage him to that kind of behavior that will discharge herself and her husband of any punishment or penalty.

(39) But let us return to the text before us. “Whereas to Adam he said: ‘Because you listened to your wife’s words and ate from this one tree I told you not to eat from.’” Because, he is saying, you displayed such indifference about keeping the command given by me, and neither fear nor my intervening to decree the punishment liable to happen to you for eating the fruit was of any benefit, but in fact you ran headlong into

such terrible wickedness that you were unable to keep away from that single tree despite such great enjoyment, accordingly “accursed shall be the soil (146b) as you till it.” See the Lord’s loving kindness, how he punishes the serpent one way and this rational being a different way: to the former he says, “Accursed are you beyond the earth,” whereas in this case he doesn’t speak in that way. What, then? “Accursed shall be the soil as you till it.” Appropriately, too. You see, since the soil had been produced for the sake of the human being so that he might thus be able to enjoy what sprang from it, accordingly in turn he places a curse on it on account of the human being’s sin; because the curse on it impairs in turn the human being’s relaxation and tranquillity, he says, “Accursed shall be the soil as you till it.”

(40) Then, so that you may learn what “accursed” means, he added, “In pain may you eat from it all the days of your life.” See how each punishment is extended for a lifetime, so that not only may they personally be the better off for it, but that those destined to follow in future may learn from these very events whence the source of this punishment (146c) derived in their case: “In pain,” he says, “may you eat from it all the days of your life.” Then, to teach us more precisely the kind of curse and the cause of the pain, he added, “Thorns and thistles let it yield you.” Behold the reminders of the curse: thorns it will bring forth, he says, and thistles so as to give rise to great labor and discomfort, and I will ensure you pass the whole time with pain so that this experience may prove a brake on your getting ideas above your station and you may instead have a thought to your own make-up and never again bear to be deceived in these matters.

(41) “You are to eat of the grass of the field. In the sweat of your brow may you eat your bread.” See how after his disobedience everything is imposed on him in an opposite way to his former life style: My intention in bringing you into the world, he is saying, was that you should live your life without pain or toil, difficulty or sweat, (146d) and that you should be in a state of enjoyment and prosperity, and not be subject to the needs of the body but be free from all such and have the good

fortune to experience complete freedom. Since, however, such indulgence was of no benefit to you, accordingly I curse the ground so that it will not in future yield its harvest as before without tilling and ploughing; instead, I invest you with great labor, toil and difficulty, and with unremitting pain and despair, and I am ensuring that everything you do is achieved only by sweat so that under pressure from these you may have continual guidance in keeping to limits and recognizing your own make-up. Nor will this continue for a short period or a brief space of time: it will last all your life. "In the sweat of your brow may you eat your bread until you return to the soil whence you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you are to return." (147a) You will endure this as long as the span of your life is extended and you decompose into the material you were formed from. You see, even though in my loving kindness I endowed you with a bodily nature, yet your body being from the earth will in turn revert to the earth. "For dust you are, and to dust you are to return." After all, to prevent this happening I said, "Do not touch the tree," explaining that "on the day you eat of it you will truly die." You see, this was not my intention; on the contrary, everything on my part was carried through, but you appropriated it for yourself—so don't attribute the blame to anyone else, but put it down to your own indifference.

(42) At this point, however, a further question arises for us, which, if you don't mind, we'll dispose of immediately at this stage and bring the sermon to a close. God said, the text tells us, "On the day you eat from it you will truly die;" (147b) yet they are shown living for a great number of years after the disobedience and tasting the food. This seems to pose a problem for those who read the subject matter superficially; if however you give your attention to it in the proper spirit, the verse is clear and offers no problem to the student. You see, even if they lived a long time, nevertheless from the time they heard the words, "Dust you are, and to dust you are to return," and received the sentence of death, they became liable to death and you would say from that moment they were dead. So this is what Scripture is also implying when it says

that “on the day you eat, you will truly die”—that is to say, receive the sentence of being mortal from now on. I mean, just as in the case of human tribunals, when someone receives the sentence of beheading and is cast into prison, (147c) even if he stays there a long time his life is no better than that of dead people and corpses, being already dead by reason of his sentence, in just the same way they, too, from the day they received the sentence of mortality were dead by reason of their sentence, even if they lasted a long time.

(43) I know that our words have been numerous and the thread of our teaching has been drawn out to great length. Hence, since by the grace of God and to the extent of our ability we have proposed everything to you and brought to a conclusion the subject matter we read about, let us at this point close the sermon. It would, in fact, have been possible for us to propose other matters, illustrating further that the imposition of that very punishment and their being made liable to death was a mark of great depths of loving kindness. But in case we smother your thinking with a great surfeit of words, come now, let us encourage you as you leave here (147d) not to give your time to brainless gatherings or to improper gossiping; instead, reflect privately and rehearse with one another what has been said, reminding yourselves of what the judge said in reply, what defense the guilty made, how the man shifted the blame on to the woman and she shifted it to the serpent, how God punished that creature and the fact that he inflicted on it the punishment that would be constant and lasting for all time, that in its regard he delivered a severe denunciation and thus demonstrated his care for those deceived. You see, from the fact that he punished their deceiver it is clear that he had practiced his deception on people very dear to God. Next recall from this text the sentence on the woman, and the punishment inflicted on her, or rather the admonition, and thus recall the words addressed to Adam, (148a) remembering the sentence, “Dust you are, and to dust you are to return;” find cause for wonder in this at God’s ineffable love, that we, though coming from dust and decomposing into it, are deemed worthy, should we wish to embrace vir-

tue and shun evil, of those unspeakable good things prepared for those who love him, "which eye has not seen nor ear heard, nor have they entered man's heart."²³

(44) Consequently, we ought to pay the Lord abundant thanks for his so generous favors and never consign them to oblivion; instead, through good works and careful avoidance of foul deeds let us win his approval and render him well disposed to us. I mean, how could we avoid the appearance of ingratitude if, while he who is God and immortal does not decline to take on himself our mortal nature and earthly character, (148b) free us from the ancient curse of death, lead us to highest heaven, honor us with his ancestral home and deem us worthy of being honored by all the heavenly host, whereas we are not ashamed to requite him in just the opposite way, gluing our immortal soul (so to say) on to our body and thus ensuring that it becomes earthly, perishable and impotent? Let us not, I beseech you, be so ungrateful to such a constant benefactor of ours; let us rather keep his laws and perform what he has decided and is well-pleasing to him, so that he may declare us worthy also of eternal goods. May we all be judged deserving of such goods, thanks to the grace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, power and honor, now and forever for ages of ages. Amen.

23. 1 Cor 2.9; cf. Is 64.4; 65.17.

SAINT
JOHN CHRYSOSTOM
HOMILIES ON GENESIS
18–45

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ABBREVIATIONS

- "*Akribeia*" Hill, Robert C., "*Akribeia*: a principle of Chrysostom's exegesis," *Colloquium* 14 (October, 1981), pp. 32–36.
- CCG *Corpus Christianorum. Series graeca*. Turnhout: Brepols, 1976–.
- CPG *Clavis Patrum Graecorum*, Vol. II. ed. M. Geerard. Turnhout: Brepols, 1974.
- DBS *Dictionnaire de la Bible. Supplément*, ed. L. Pirot. Paris, 1928–.
- FOTC The Fathers of the Church. New York and Washington, D.C., 1947–.
- "horses" Hill, Robert C., "On giving up horses for Lent," *Clergy Review* 68 (March, 1983), pp. 105–106.
- "Incarnation" Hill, Robert C., "Saint John Chrysostom and the Incarnation of the Word in Scripture," *Compass Theology Review* 14 (1980), pp. 34–38.
- Inspiration* Hill, Robert C., *Saint John Chrysostom's Teaching on Inspiration in his Old Testament Homilies*. Sydney, 1981.
- JThS *The Journal of Theological Studies*. London, 1899–.
- ODCC *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. 2d ed. ed. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone. Oxford, 1984.
- PG *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series graeca*, 161 volumes. ed. J. P. Migne. Paris, 1857–1866.
- SC *Sources Chrétiennes*, ed. H. de Lubac and J. Daniélou. Paris, 1942–.
- SP *Studia Patristica*. International Conference on Patristic Studies at Oxford. (Berlin, and elsewhere)
- "*sunkatabasis*" Hill, Robert C., "On looking again at *sunkatabasis*," *Prudentia* 13 (1981), pp. 3–11.
- "terminology" Hill, Robert C., "Chrysostom's terminology for the inspired Word," *Estudios Bíblicos* 41 (1983), pp. 367–373.
- TRE *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*

Abbreviations of Classical and Patristic texts follow OCD and ODCC.

HOMILIES 18–45

*Homilies 1–17 of Saint John Chrysostom are in
Volume 74 of The Fathers of the Church series.*

HOMILY 18

“Adam gave his wife the name Zoe, because she was the mother of all the living. The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clad them in them. God said, ‘Lo, Adam has become like one of us.’”¹



ID [148] YOU SEE yesterday the loving kindness of the Judge? Did you see the examination conducted in a spirit of great goodness? Did you see the difference in the kinds of punishment—how the one who caused their downfall by means of deceit was punished, on the one hand, and how, on the other hand, the punishment inflicted on the fallen demonstrates God’s great love? Did you see of how much benefit this proved to be the occasion for us, to be present in court and see how the examination proceeded? After all, they realized, Adam and Eve both, the degree and significance of the good things they had deprived themselves of through transgression of the command given them, stripped as they were of that ineffable glory and of the life that was scarcely inferior to the angels’. We saw the Lord’s longsuffering, we learnt the gravity of indifference and how it renders us bereft of goods already in our possession and leaves us desolate, covering us in deep confusion.

(2) Hence, I beseech you, let us remain alert: may their lapses become an antidote for us, and their indifference prove to be a motive for caution on our part, especially as the punishment for those erring in the same way in the future will

1. Gen 3.20–22. In adopting Zoe as the woman’s name, the LXX is translating the Hebrew *ḥavah* rather than simply transliterating it as *(H)eva*, so as the better to reproduce the balance between name and function in the original; perhaps likewise the best English version of the name would be “Life,” to balance “living.” When at Tob 8.6 such balance is not required, the LXX is content with *Eva*. Chrysostom, however, in his commentary on the text settles at once for the latter, preferring tradition to philology.

be the greater, the more they have been reluctant to profit from their example. You see, people who after these events sin in the same respect will not have the same sentence meted out to them, something we can briefly learn from the world's wise teacher—I mean [149] blessed Paul—when he says, “As many as sinned without the Law will perish without the Law, whereas as many as sinned with the Law in force will be judged by the Law.”² What he means is this: those prior to the Law will not receive the same sentence as those after the Law; instead, those sinning after the giving of the Law will undergo heavier penalties. “As many as sinned without the Law will perish without the Law,” that is to say, the fact of having no instruction or assistance from the Law makes the penalty milder for them. “Whereas as many as sinned with the Law in force will be judged by the Law”; these on the other hand, he is saying, having the Law as teacher and being so much the wiser yet sinning in the same way as the others, will receive the heavier penalty.

(3) But let us listen to what was read today also. “Adam called his wife Eve, which means life, because she was the mother of all the living.” See the precision of Sacred Scripture, how it didn't pass over even this detail, but taught us that Adam named his wife as well. “He called his wife Eve, which means life,” the text says, you see, “because she was the mother of all the living”—that is to say, she is the source of all those who will come from her, the root and foundation of the future race. Then, after teaching us the naming of the woman, it further shows us God's goodness, how he does not overlook them in their depth of shame and nakedness after being created by him. “The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife,” the text says, “and clad them in them.” In other words, take the case of a kindly father with a son of his own who was brought up with every care, who enjoyed every indulgence, had the run of a fine house, was clad in a silken tunic, and had free access to his father's substance and wealth; later, when he saw him tumble headlong

from this great indulgence into an abyss of wickedness, he stripped him of all those assets, subjected him to his own authority and, divesting him of his clothes, clad him in a lowly garment usually worn by slaves lest he be completely naked and indecent. Well, in just the same way the loving God, when they rendered themselves unworthy of that gleaming and resplendent vesture in which they were adorned and which ensured they were prepared against bodily needs, stripped them of all that glory and the enjoyment they were partakers of before suffering that terrible fall. He showed them great pity and had mercy on their fall: seeing them covered in confusion and ignorant of what to do to avoid being naked and feeling ashamed, he makes garments of skin for them and clothes them in them.

(4) What I mean is that the machinations of the devil are quite different: when he finds people ready to do his will, he proves their undoing through some slight enjoyment, then drags them down to the very depths of wickedness and covers them in utter shame and degradation, leaving them prostrate, a piteous spectacle for all to see—whereas the Guardian of our souls, seeing them in utter helplessness, doesn't allow himself to ignore their condition but devises a covering for them, while indicating to them through the frugality of the garment the sort of garments they have caused themselves to deserve. [150] "The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clad them in them." See the extent of the considerateness of Sacred Scripture. Still, what I've often said I say again now: let us understand everything in a sense befitting God. Let us understand "made" in the sense of "gave directions for": he ordered that they be clad in garments of skin as a constant reminder of their disobedience.

(5) Let the affluent pay heed, those who pamper themselves with cloth from the silkworm and are clad in silk, and let them learn how at the beginning from the outset the loving Lord instructed the human race: when the firstformed man became liable to the punishment of death through the Fall and the Lord had to clothe him in a garment to hide his shame, he made them garments of skin, to teach us to shun

the soft and dissolute life, and not to pine for one that is lazy and characterized by inactivity, but rather strive for an austere life. Perhaps, however, the wealthy will react badly to our words and will say, What reason is there in that? do you bid us wear garments of skin? No, I'm not saying that; after all, not even Adam and Eve wore those garments all the time, the loving Lord always adding further kindnesses to his previous ones, you see. I mean, when he rendered them liable to bodily necessities for the future, stripping them of the angelic way of life and its freedom from suffering, he later arranged for clothes for human beings out of sheep's fleece for no other reason than that they should have covering and that this rational creature should not live his life in nakedness and ugliness just like brute beasts. Accordingly, let the wearing of clothes be a constant reminder to us of the loss of advantages and instruction about the punishment which the race of human beings received on account of disobedience. Accordingly, let those people who make use of such paraphernalia that they are no longer familiar with garments of sheep's wool, but are clad in silk and have been carried to such extremes that they even drape gold with covering, the female sex particularly demonstrating this kind of luxury—let them, I say, tell us: Why do you dress up the body with these things and delight in clothing of that kind, not understanding that this covering was devised as severe punishment for the Fall? I mean, why do you not heed Paul's words, "We will be content to have food and clothing"³? Do you see that it is necessary to be concerned with one thing only, that the body not be naked, and to have an eye only to this, that no further worry be had about variety of dress?

(6) Let us, however, move to what follows. "God said, 'Lo, Adam has become like one of us in knowing good and ill. Now there is a risk that at some time he may put out his hand and pick fruit from the tree of life, eat it and live forever.' The Lord God sent him out of the garden of delight to till the soil from which he was taken."⁴ See again God's consid-

3. 1 Tim 6.8.

4. Gen 3.22-23.

erateness. "The Lord God said," the text says, "Lo, Adam has become like one of us in knowing good and ill." Do you see how remarkable is the ordinariness of the expression? Let us, however, take it all in a sense befitting God.⁵ You see, the intention at this point is to remind us through these words of the deception practiced on them by the devil through the instrumentality of the serpent. I mean, that was when that creature said, "'If you eat, you will be [151] like gods,'" and they presumed to taste it in the hope of achieving this equality. Hence also God wanted again to make them ashamed, to bring them to a sense of their sins and to show them the gravity of their disobedience and the excess of the deception, said, "'Lo, Adam has become like one of us.'" Great is the reproach in this sentence, capable of touching the heart of the transgressor. Was this your reason, he is saying, for despising my command, that you had notions of equality? Lo, you have become what you expected—or rather, not what you expected but what you deserved to become. "'Lo,'" he says, "'Adam has become like one of us in knowing good and evil.'" This, in fact, is what the guileful devil said to them through the serpent, that "'your eyes will be opened, and you will be like gods, knowing good and ill.'"

(7) "'Now there is a risk that at some time he may put out his hand and pick fruit from the tree of life, eat it and live forever.'" See here, I ask you, the Lord's loving kindness. I mean, we must study the saying precisely so that nothing concealed under the surface can escape us. When God gave Adam the command, he bade him abstain from nothing, with the single exception of that tree, and when he presumed to taste it he received the sentence of death; he made this clear to him in giving him the command in case he should break it, though he had given him no express instructions about the

5. As remarked at many points in Vol. I (FOTC 74) and explained at length in Introduction (20), *synkatabasis*, "considerateness" (not "condescension"), is for Chrysostom characteristic of the divine Author of the Scriptures. Hence, the need in the commentator and reader/listener to respond by acknowledging both the "ordinariness," *tapeinōsis*, of the language so considerably used, especially in the case of anthropomorphisms like the present, and divine transcendence, not to be put at risk.

tree of life. I mean, since he created him immortal, as I see it and you can understand, it would have been possible for Adam, if he had wanted, to partake of that tree along with the others, a tree that was able to provide him with endless life—hence he was given no instruction about it.

(8) If, however, someone of a meddling nature should enquire why it was called the tree of life, let him learn that it was not possible for human beings to discern all God's works precisely by following their own reasoning. The Lord, you see, decided that the human being created by him should have some practice in disobedience and obedience while living in the garden, and decided to provide examples there of these two trees, one of life, the other of death (so to say) in the sense that tasting it and breaking the command brought death on him. So when by partaking of this tree he became liable to death and subject in the future to the needs of the body, and the entry of sin had its beginnings as the result of which death also was fittingly provided for by the Lord, no longer did he allow Adam in the garden but bade him leave there, showing us that his sole motive in doing this was his love for him.

(9) To learn this precisely, we must read again the words of Sacred Scripture. "Now there is a risk that at some time he may put out his hand and pick fruit from the tree, eat it and live forever." In other words, since he had given signs of considerable intemperance through the command already given him (he is saying) and had become subject to death, lest he presume further to lay hold of this tree which offers endless life and go on sinning forever, it would be better for him to be driven from here. And so the expulsion from the garden was a mark of care rather than necessity. Our Lord, you see, is like this: he reveals his care for us in punishing no less than in blessing, and even his punishment is inflicted for the sake of admonition. Because if in fact he knew that we would not get worse by sinning and escaping, he would not have punished us; but to check our decline into greater evil and to stem the tide of wickedness, he applies punishment out of fidelity to his own loving kindness—[152] which is exactly

what he did in this case: in his care for the firstformed human being he bade him be driven out of the garden. "The Lord God sent him out of the garden of delight to till the soil from which he was taken." See here once again, I ask you, the precision of Sacred Scripture: "The Lord God sent him out of the garden of delight," the text says, "to till the soil from which he was taken." See, he puts the sentence into effect, driving him out of the garden of delight and obliging him to till the soil from which he was taken. It was not without purpose that he said, "from which he was taken." It was that he might in this work have a constant reminder of his humiliation, and be in a position to know that his subsistence derived from that source, and the composition of his body originally came from the soil—hence, he says, till the soil from which he himself was composed. He had said as much also in the sentence, "In the sweat of your brow may you eat your bread." Accordingly at this point also he says the same thing in the phrase, "to till the soil from which he was taken."

(10) Then, so that we may learn how great was the distance he moved him from the garden, Sacred Scripture teaches us this further fact in the words, "The Lord God drove Adam out and situated him opposite the garden of delight."⁶ Notice how each of the events proved an occasion of loving kindness on the part of the common Lord of all, and each example of punishment abounds with goodness. I mean, the expulsion was not the sole mark of love and goodness: there was also his location opposite the garden so that he might have unending anguish in recollecting from what heights he had fallen and cast himself into such depths. Yet even if the sight of it was the cause of unbearable pain, it was nevertheless an occasion of no little benefit: the constant sight proved to be an encouragement for this grieving man to carefulness in the future lest he fall into the same sin again. Such, after all, is the habit of human nature by and large: since, while we are in a position to enjoy good things, we don't know how to use

6. Gen 3.24a in the LXX version, which by supplying the pronoun "him" has slightly altered the sense of the whole verse.

them as we ought, we come to our senses with the loss of these things by learning through experience and gaining a sense of our own indifference. In this way we are taught by the change of fortunes from what heights we have fallen and with what troubles we have tortured ourselves. And so the instruction that the one who had lost his place there should dwell nearby and opposite the garden was a sign of deep concern in order that he might have the constant reminder from the sight of it and feel a sense of loss from it and never presume to eat from the tree through lusting after life while finding himself outside. Thus, you see, Sacred Scripture describes everything to us in a manner that shows considerateness for our limitations.

(11) "He set the Cherubim and the flailing sword of fire to guard the approach to the tree of life."⁷ Their indifference, which they had already demonstrated in regard to the command given them, proved the cause of the approach being barred against them with such precautions. Consider, I ask you, that the loving God was not content with their dwelling opposite the garden: he placed these powers, the Cherubim and the flailing sword of fire, to guard the way leading there. It was not without purpose that "flailing" was added: the reason was to teach us that every way was barred to him since [153] that sword was turning around and blocking every way leading there, sufficient to provide him with a reminder and fill him with constant fear.

(12) "Now, Adam had intercourse with his wife Eve."⁸ Consider when this happened. After their disobedience, after their loss of the garden, then it was that the practice of intercourse had its beginning. You see, before their disobedience they followed a life like that of the angels, and there was no mention of intercourse. How could there be, when they were not subject to the needs of the body? So, at the outset and from the beginning the practice of virginity was in force; but when through their indifference disobedience came on the scene and the ways of sin were opened, virginity took its leave

7. Gen 3.24b in the LXX version. 8. Gen 4.1.

for the reason that they had proved unworthy of such a degree of good things, and in its place the practice of intercourse took over for the future. Accordingly, consider, I ask you, dearly beloved, how great the esteem of virginity, how elevated and important a thing it is, surpassing human nature and requiring assistance from on high. I mean, for proof that those who practice virginity with enthusiasm demonstrate in the body the characteristics of incorporeal powers, listen to the words of Christ to the Sadducees: when they were discussing the question of resurrection and wanted to learn his view, they asked, "Master, there were seven brothers of our acquaintance. The eldest married and died without children, leaving his wife to his brother. The second died, and having no offspring left his wife to his brother; likewise with the third, fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh. So at the resurrection to which of the seven will the wife belong? After all, she belonged to them all." So what reply did Christ make to them? "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God: at the resurrection, far from marrying or being given in marriage, they will be like angels."⁹ Do you see how those who have followed the vocation to virginity for the love of Christ imitate the life of angels through treading the earth and being clad in a body? I mean, the greater and more elevated the task, so much and even greater the laurels, the rewards and the good things promised to those who give evidence of the practice of good works along with this vocation.

(13) "Now, Adam had intercourse with his wife Eve," the text says, "and she conceived and gave birth to Cain." Since sin had come on the scene through the act of disobedience, and the sentence had the effect of making them liable to death, for the future God in his inventiveness arranged for the continuance of the human race according to his wisdom by allowing for the propagation of the race through intercourse.

(14) "She said, 'I have gained a human being, thanks to

9. A paraphrase of Matt 22.24-30, which has parallels in Mark 12.19-25 and Luke 20.28-36.

God.’” See how the imposition of the punishment brought the woman to her senses? She attributes the child she bore not to a natural process but to God, and displays her own gratitude. Do you see how the punishment proved an occasion of admonition to them? The text says, remember, “‘I have gained a human being, thanks to God.’” It was not nature, she is saying, that presented me with the child; [154] instead, grace from above has given him to me.

(15) “She proceeded to give birth to his brother Abel.”¹⁰ Since she proved to be grateful for the birth of the first child and acknowledged the former kindness, she enjoyed the good fortune of the second. Our Lord is like this, you see: when we display gratitude for previous good deeds and acknowledge the benefactor, he lavishes his gifts upon us more generously. Accordingly, because she attributed the birth to God, for that reason she receives another child. You see, the generation of children was the greatest consolation from then on, once mortality had come on the scene. For this reason, of course, the loving God at once and from the beginning reduced the severity of their punishment and stripped away the fearsome visage of death by favoring them with the propagation of children, foreshadowing, as it were, in this event an image of resurrection and ensuring that others would rise up in place of the fallen.

(16) “Abel was a shepherd, whereas Cain was a tiller of the soil.” Sacred Scripture taught us the occupations of each of the children and the fact that while one preferred tending flocks, the other tilled the soil. “In the course of time Cain brought an offering of the fruits of the earth to the Lord.”¹¹ Consider how the Lord of nature added knowledge to conscience. After all, who brought this to our understanding? It was none other than knowledge associated with conscience. The text says, “He brought an offering of the fruits of the earth to the Lord.” He knew and understood that he should offer from his own possessions some produce to God as to his master, not because God needs them, but for the purpose

10. Gen 4.2.

11. Gen 4.3.

of demonstrating his gratitude as being himself a beneficiary of such kindness. God, you see, is proof against need, and depends on nothing we have to offer; but in his ineffable love he shows considerateness for us, and for the sake of our salvation he allows these things to happen so that knowledge of the Lord may be for the human race a school of virtue.

(17) "Abel also for his part brought an offering of the first-born of his flock."¹² It was not idly or in vain that in beginning this sermon we taught your good selves that our Lord does not recognize differences in appearance but takes account of intentions and rewards the will. Here, too, to be sure, notice this happening. Accordingly, let us attend with precision, dearly beloved, to the text and see what Scripture says about Cain on the one hand and Abel on the other, and let us not pass it by heedlessly.¹³ I mean, Sacred Scripture says nothing idly or by chance; instead, even if it happens to be a syllable or a single jot, it has some treasure concealed in it. Such, after all, is the nature of all things spiritual. So what does the text say? "In the course of time Cain brought an offering of the fruits of the earth to the Lord, and Abel also for his part brought an offering of the firstborn of his flock, and in fact the fattest of them." The meaning of the verse is clear even from the reading to those already capable of following more closely. But since we should exercise our concern in general for everyone (spiritual teaching, after all, recognizes no distinction), come now, let us expose the meaning of the words more clearly and rehearse these same words again. "Cain," the text says, "brought an offering of the fruits of the earth to the Lord"; then, wanting to teach us about Abel as well, Sacred Scripture says that he for his part also brought his offering [155] from his occupation and his shepherding. "He, for his part, also brought an offering," the text says,

12. Gen 4:4.

13. Over and over again Chrysostom reminds his readers of the "precision," *akribeia*, of the text of Scripture—a gift of divine considerateness—and of the corresponding obligation to precision in the commentator/reader. Hence the respect shown at Antioch for the literal sense of the sacred text. See Introduction (21) (FOTC 74) and my article, "Akribeia."

remember, "of the firstborn of his flock, and in fact the fattest of them." Notice how it hints to us of the piety of this man's attitude, and the fact that he did not casually offer any one of his sheep, but "one of the firstborn," that is, from the valuable and special ones. In Cain's case, on the contrary, nothing of the kind is suggested; rather, the fact that he brought "an offering of the fruits of the earth," as if to say, whatever came to hand, without any display of zeal or precise care.

(18) I repeat, and I shall not cease to make the point: God accepts our offerings not because he needs what we have to offer but because he wants our gratitude to be demonstrated through them as well. In other words, the person who makes an offering to God and offers him something of his own, and who calls to mind the difference in nature and the fact that a human being has been granted such a great honor, should give as good an account of himself as possible and offer the choicest gifts. But notice in this case, I ask you, dearly beloved: here you have the opportunity to contemplate what behoves you, namely, that the person who through indifference betrayed his own welfare duly pays the penalty. I mean, it wasn't a case of one man having a teacher and the other having a counsellor and adviser: each had instructions from his own conscience, and being moved by the intelligence supplied to the human race from above he proceeded to make his offering, such as it was; but the difference in attitude that emerged and the mediocrity of choice caused one man's offering to be acceptable and the other's to be spurned.

(19) "God took notice of Abel and his gifts." See how in this case is fulfilled the saying in the gospel that the first will be last and the last first.¹⁴ I mean, see how the one who enjoyed priority belonging to the firstborn and consequently made his offering first was shown to be inferior to his brother since he made it unworthily: as both presented their offerings, Sacred Scripture says, "God took notice of Abel and his gifts." What does that mean, "He took notice"? He accepted, he approved of the attitude, he rewarded the choice, he was

14. Cf. Mark 10.32; Matt 19.30; Luke 13.30.

satisfied (so to say) with what was done. You see, we speak about God and presume to open our mouth about that pure nature, yet being human we would have no choice but to understand these things through language. Notice, however, this remarkable feature: "God took notice of Abel and his gifts," the text says; it calls the offering of sheep gifts on account of the importance, the choice quality, the untainted appearance of what was offered. Accordingly, God took notice of him for the reason that he had made the offering with a pure intention, and of his gifts for the reason not only that they were free of imperfection but that they were in every respect clearly precious, both from the viewpoint of the offerer's intention and from the fact of their being the firstborn and in fact specially selected from them, among the fattest of them and the very prize ones.

(20) "God took notice of Abel and his gifts," the text says, "whereas to Cain and his offerings he paid no heed." Since Abel made his offering with a proper attitude and pure intention, "God took notice," the text says—that is, he accepted, he was satisfied, he approved of them; but it called the offerings gifts, by this means dignifying the attitude of the offerer. "Whereas to Cain and his offerings he paid no heed." Notice [156] the precision of Sacred Scripture: by the phrase "he paid no heed" it shows us the rejection of what was offered, and by calling what was offered from the soil offerings he teaches us something else again. I mean, see how he shows us through the very events and terms that the Lord wants all these things to be done by us so that the kind of intention we have should be made clear through the actions we take, and so that we may be in a position to know that we are subject to a Lord and Creator who brought us from nothing to being. In other words, in naming the sheep gifts and calling the things from the earth offerings, Sacred Scripture teaches us that neither the herding of sheep nor the collection of fruits of the earth is what is looked for by the Lord but simply the disposition of one's attitude. Hence in this case, too, one man proved acceptable with his gift on this score, whereas the other was rejected along with his gift on that account. The

verse, "God took notice of Abel and his gifts, whereas to Cain and his offering he paid no heed," let us take in a sense befitting God. I mean, the intention in the words is that he communicated to them the awareness that while he was satisfied with one man's choice, he took umbrage at the other's attitude.

(21) Such, however, is the way God does things; let us now see what follows. "This annoyed Cain very much and his face fell."¹⁵ What is the meaning of the words, "This annoyed Cain very much"? There were two reasons for his annoyance, not just that he alone had been rejected, but also that his brother's gift had been accepted. "This annoyed Cain," the text says, "and his face fell." What was it that annoyed him? Both things annoyed him, the Lord's ignoring his offering and his brother's gift being welcomed. So it was necessary that he recognize his guilt and adjust the error of his ways. After all, our Lord is loving, and when we err he does not turn away from us because of our error as if we continued in the error; on the contrary, he keeps no record of it. In order that you may learn this with precision and see the indescribable magnitude of the loving kindness, consider in these present events the exceeding degree of his goodness and the extent of his longsuffering. I mean, when he saw Cain annoyed unreasonably and, so to say, at the point of drowning in the waves of his annoyance, he did not ignore him; instead, that love which he had shown for his father in giving him the opportunity for excuse and opening the way to renewed confidence in the words, "Where are you?" despite that damaging fall—the very same love he now demonstrates towards the man who had proved so ungrateful, and stretches out his hand to this person who was at the point of tumbling down the cliff, as you might say, desirous as he was of offering him the opportunity to adjust the error of his ways. So he says to him, "For what reason are you so annoyed? For what reason has your face fallen? Is it not true that, even if you make your offering correctly but fail to choose the offering correctly, you commit

15. Gen 4-5.

sin? Be at peace, then: his movement is towards you, and you will be superior to him.”¹⁶

(22) Consider, I ask you, dearly beloved, the ineffable considerateness in his care when he saw Cain under assault, so to speak, from the passion of envy, see how out of fidelity to his own goodness he applied various remedies to him so that he might be quickly plucked from the water and not be drowned. “‘For what reason are you annoyed? For what reason has your face fallen?’” Why on earth, he is saying, are you overcome with such resentment as to show the extent of your displeasure on your face? “‘For what reason has your face fallen?’” Why has this event so affected you? Why have you not considered what your obligation was? [157] You weren’t making your offering to a human being, capable of being deceived, were you? Did you not realize that I wasn’t looking for some offering or other of yours, but for the pure intention of the offerer? “‘For what reason are you annoyed? For what reason has your face fallen? Is it not true that, even if you make your offering correctly but fail to choose the offering correctly, you commit sin?’” That is to say, while your having the idea of making an offering was commendable, still your not choosing the offering correctly led to the rejection of the offering. The one who makes an offering to God, you know, must show great care in the choice, and the greater the difference between the recipient and the offerer, the greater the distinction you should lend to your choice. You, however, gave no thought to these matters but simply offered whatever came to hand; hence they in turn could not be judged acceptable. You see, just as your intention in making the offering did not make allowance for the difference in status, and so caused the offering presented by you to be rejected; in like manner, your brother’s intention, which happened to be correct and revealed great care in the choice, caused his gifts to be ac-

16. Gen 4.6–7, a text that has always puzzled interpreters; Speiser observes that this LXX rendering almost perfectly adheres to the letters of the Hebrew text but divides words differently, yielding a different sense in the way Chrysostom takes the words here. Actually, Chrysostom allows for a still further interpretation when he opens the matter again in Homily 19.

ceptable. Still, I am not demanding a penalty for the error but merely highlighting the sin and offering you advice, provided you want to take it, mend your ways and not involve yourself in worse evils.

(23) So what is the upshot? You have sinned, and sinned grievously, but I am not imposing punishment for the sin; after all, I am loving, and "I do not want the death of the sinner, rather that he be converted and live."¹⁷ Since, then, you have sinned, be at peace, lend calm to your thinking and rid yourself of the onset of the waves crashing around your mind, settle the storm lest you add to the previous sin another more grievous one and set your mind on something beyond repair. Don't give yourself into the clutches of the wicked demon. "You have sinned, be at peace." He knew right from the outset that the future attack against his brother would take place, and by these words he checks it beforehand. You see, since he was God and knew the unspoken intentions of Cain's mind, he was aware of the movements of his heart; so with this earnest exhortation and the considerateness of his words he applies the appropriate remedy to him, doing everything in his power in case this man should reject the medication and fall headlong into the abyss of fratricide. "You have sinned, be at peace." Don't think, he says, even if I have turned away from your offering owing to your incorrect attitude and have welcomed your brother's gift because of his sound choice, that I have stripped you of your pride of place and removed you from the distinction of firstborn. "Be at peace," even if he has been deemed worthy of my regard and his gifts have proved acceptable, nevertheless "his movement is towards you, and you will be superior to him." And so even after this sin I permit you to have the privilege of being firstborn, and I bid him be subject to your authority and your control.

(24) See the Lord's loving kindness, how he wishes to defuse the wild frenzy and remove the anger by means of his words. You see, he observed the stages of his thinking and

17. Ezek 18.23.

realized the savagery of his deadly intention; so he intends at this early stage to sedate his thinking and bring repose to his mind by placing his brother subject to him and not undermining his authority. But even despite such great concern and such potent remedies, [158] Cain gained nothing from the experience. Such was the degree of difference in their attitudes and the excess of evil intent.

(25) Lest, however, we prolong the sermon unduly and thus seem to tax the patience of your good selves, and lest our homily bore you to tears and be considered an ordeal to you, let us bring the talking to a halt at this stage. Let us commend this point to your warm attention, to avoid imitating conduct of that kind, bid good riddance to evil, and devote yourself to the Lord's command with great attention and with your whole heart, especially in the wake of such examples and others like them. I mean, in future none of us will be able to take refuge in ignorance. After all, if that man—I mean Cain—was not in a position to find anyone living before his time who did anything of that kind, and still was subjected to that severe and unbearable punishment, as you will later discover, what is it likely that we will suffer—we who have committed those sins and even worse ones despite such a generous measure of grace? Will it not assuredly be everlasting fire, the worm that does not die, gnashing of teeth, exterior darkness, a fiery hell and all those other ineluctable punishments awaiting us? I mean, there will be no grounds for excuse left for us, since we have been so much disposed to sloth and so remiss. Surely, after all, we are all aware of what is to be done, and the sorts of things that should not be done? and that those who practice the former will enjoy the choicest of rewards, while those who fall victim to the latter will undergo condemnation to the most extreme of penalties?


(26) Hence I beseech, entreat and implore you not to let our assembling here prove to be of no avail; instead, let attention to our words be followed by deeds, so that having the certainty that comes from a good conscience and being buoyed up already in our present situation with sound hope, we may be able to negotiate with ease this life's sea of prob-

lems and put in at the harbor of God's loving kindness, thus attaining to those good things beyond all telling which the Lord has promised to those who love him, thanks to the grace and mercy of his only-begotten Son, to whom with the holy and adorable Spirit be glory, power and honor, now and forever, for all ages of ages. Amen.¹⁸

18. A rare variant of the trinitarian doxology with which Chrysostom closes all the homilies.

HOMILY 19

*"And Cain said to his brother Abel, 'Come now, let us go out into the open country.'"*¹

 NCURABLE [158] WOUNDS RESPOND neither to the harshest of remedies nor to those with benign properties.² Just so with the soul: once it falls into bondage and surrenders itself to any sin whatever, it has no interest in recognizing what is for its own good. Even if someone makes a fuss about it over and over again, it is all to no avail; instead, as though with deaf ears it gains no benefit from correction—not because it lacks the ability but because it lacks the will. Not that things are exactly the same in the case of the will as you can observe in the case of bodily wounds; with bodily ailments the natural condition is often stationary, whereas it is not like this at all with the will. Instead, in many cases a villain changes if he wants to and becomes good, and a good person who falls victim to indifference lapses into evil. So the God of all has endowed our nature with free will; he gives evidence of every effort on his part in fidelity to his own loving kindness, and in his knowledge of all the unspoken intentions in the [159] depth of our mind he exhorts and advises us and checks our evil plans ahead of time. To be sure, he does not impose necessity upon us, but in applying the appropriate remedies he allows everything to rest in the intention of the patient.

1. Gen 4.8.

2. An unusually direct opening for Chrysostom: in place of the usual exhortation involving a range of figures for Sacred Scripture and its benefits, there is immediate reference to the body of the previous homily (just as that homily closed with an unusual variation to the otherwise invariable trinitarian doxology). Some particular circumstance may underly the relationship of Homilies 18 and 19.

(2) Accordingly, this is just what happened in the present instance with Cain: see what depths of folly he has fallen into despite such care. You see, he should now have been engrossed in the correction of his sin, once he became aware of it; like a man intoxicated, however, he adds a further wound to his previous suffering and injured condition and refuses the healing applied to him with such care. He hastens the process of bringing his own destruction into effect, beginning with cunning and trickery and by deceiving his brother with beguiling words. Such is the condition of a human being turned animal who goes downhill into wickedness; just as this rational creature enjoys a wonderful status, especially when it makes rapid progress in the practice of virtue, so when it goes downhill into wickedness, it takes on the character of wild beasts. In fact, when it takes on the ferocity of those creatures, this mild and rational creature outstrips their savagery by a large measure.

(3) So let us see here too what happens. "Cain said to his brother Abel, 'Come now, let us go out into the open country.'" The words are those of a brother, but the intention is that of a murderer. O Cain, what are you doing? Don't you know to whom you're talking? Don't you understand that this conversation is taking place with your brother? Don't you realize that he was born of the same mother as you? Have you no notion of the foulness of your scheme? Have you no fear of the judge who is proof against deception? Don't you shudder at the realization of your temerity? Why is it, after all, that you are enticing your brother out into the open country and leading him out of his father's paternal arms? Why are you depriving him of his father's assistance? What is this fresh development, that now you are enticing your brother into the open country and scheming to do something you have not done previously, and on the pretext of friendship feigning brotherly concern, while intending to unleash a war-like assault upon him? What is this madness? What is this fury? Even supposing that you are deranged in mind and make no account of brotherly regard nor recognize the demands of nature itself, still why make an attack in this way

on the person who has done you no wrong? What grudge do you bear your parents as well that you should want to inflict such grief on them by becoming protagonist in this dreadful tragedy and confront them with this violent death? Is this the gratitude you show them for your upbringing? What wiles of the devil have drawn you into this deed? Surely, after all, you can't claim that the favor of the common Lord of all shown towards Abel caused him to look down on you? Did the Lord not anticipate your murderous intent and place him under your authority in subjection to you in those words, "—'His movement is towards you, and you will be superior to him'?"³

(4) This sentence, you see, should be taken to refer to the brother's subjection. Some people, of course, say that God addressed such words to Cain in regard to the offering presented by him: "'Its movement'"—that is, the offering's—"is towards you, and you will control it'"—that is, you will enjoy it. So for this reason I have quoted both senses, leaving it to your judgment to choose for yourselves which seems worth following.⁴ To my mind, anyhow, it seems to refer to the brother.

(5) "While they were [160] in the open country, Cain set upon his brother Abel and killed him." A terrible deed, a dangerous precedent, a loathsome exploit, an unforgivable sin, a bestial intention of mind. "He set upon his brother Abel," the text says, "and killed him." O bloody hand! O piteous gesture! Rather, however, it is not the hand that should be called piteous and bloody but the intention which the limb responded to. So let us express it this way: O headstrong, bloody, piteous intention—whatever you call it, you cannot

3. That difficult verse 4.7, as remarked on in Homily 18, n. 16. Notice also Chrysostom's gift for dramatizing a situation on occasion, using rhetorical devices to explore the emotive and moral possibilities. One has also to admit that dogmatic significance of events is not always highlighted by Chrysostom to the satisfaction of modern commentators. See Introduction (17) (FOTC 74).

4. As occasionally elsewhere, Chrysostom can flatter his congregation with the option for an interpretation of a difficult passage. The "simple faithful" of the Antioch of that time were hardly unlettered, to judge from the intensely scriptural life he presumes them to enjoy. See Introduction (11) (FOTC 74).

describe it adequately. How was it that his hand was not paralyzed? how could it manage to grasp the sword and deal the blow? how is it that his soul did not fly from his body? how did it have the strength to put into effect such an unholy outrage? how is it that he did not have second thoughts and reverse his intention? how is it that he did not take stock of his nature? how is it that before beginning the exploit he did not think ahead to its result? how could he bear to see his brother's body gasping on the ground after the attack? how could he bring himself to gaze on the corpse flung to the ground without being immediately devastated by the sight? After all, despite the passing of the years and daily experience of people dying, and though these people suffer in their case the normal end of their life and are on no side related to us, we nevertheless break down; if the person is an enemy, we put an end to our enmity. So much the more, surely, would we be likely to be distraught and lose control on the spot to see a brother, whom we had been conversing with just before, child like us of the same mother and same father, born of the same family, who had attracted the favor of God, lying gasping on the ground, all at once lifeless and inert.

(6) Let us, however, look again, after this unholy deed and this arrogance beyond all excuse, at the great degree of considerateness and love employed by the God of all things. "God said to Cain."⁵ How much goodness is this itself a mark of, that the person who had performed deeds like that should be deemed worthy of being addressed! I mean, it frequently occurs that we feel loathing for our relatives when we see them guilty of some such outrage; much more should we marvel at the good God's demonstration of such longsuffering. And rightly so: he is, after all, a physician and a loving father; and like a physician he does everything and employs every skill so as to bring to good health people who have fallen victim to troublesome ailments, and like a loving father he wants in his fatherly benevolence to lead people who have forfeited their natural nobility through indifference back to their former

5. Gen 4:9.

prosperity. So since the extent of his goodness is immense, he wants to demonstrate his great love even to one whose rashness has taken him to such extremes. That is, he says to him, "Where is your brother Abel?" Beyond all limit is God's longsuffering: he asks the question, not because he was ignorant, but because he had done the same in his father's case; after all, there was nothing to prevent him saying the same thing again. You see, just as he saw Adam hiding through a sense of shame for his nakedness and asked, "'Where are you?'" not out of ignorance but to give him grounds for confidence so as to wipe away his sin by confession of his fall (this being his way, after all, to require of us confession of our sins at once from the outset and offer us pardon), so now too he asks Cain in these words, "'Where is your brother Abel?'" The loving Lord pretends ignorance so that by means of the question he may cause the man guilty of these sins to be brought [161] to confession of his guilt and be in a position to win pardon, perhaps, and love. "'Where is your brother Abel?'"

(7) So what reply is made by this ungrateful and insensitive man, headstrong and shameless as he was? He should have realized that God did not ask the question out of ignorance, but rather to require of him a confession and to teach us never to condemn our brethren before proof and to take into account the Lord's advice; rejecting this attack and knowing before its irruption the movement of his thinking, he plied him with precautionary remedies. All this should have brought him to his senses and to a cessation of his folly, admitting what had happened, showing his ulcer to the physician and accepting the remedies he had to give. But for his part he aggravates the wound and renders the spread of the ulcer more serious. "He said, 'I don't know,'" the text goes on. See the effrontery of the reply! Surely you're not addressing a human being, to feel free to converse with him as an equal? Don't you know, you poor wretch, who it is you're talking to? Don't you realize that it is out of his extreme goodness he is addressing you in his desire to find some excuse for showing you his characteristic love and with a view to your having no

grounds in future for rendering yourself liable to punishment once he has done all in his power?

(8) "He said," the text tells us, "I don't know. Surely I'm not my brother's keeper?" Recognize here, I ask you, the accusation of conscience, and how he was repulsed, as it were, by conscience and did not stop at the words, "I don't know," but added, "Surely I'm not my brother's keeper?" as if trying to convince himself. In fact, to judge from the way everything worked out for you as the sequel shows and with regard for the law of nature, you ought in fact be guardian of your brother's welfare. This, after all, is what nature determined and what is required of people in the same family, to be guardian of one another. Even if this was not your intention and you had no wish to be your brother's keeper, why did you turn his assassin and kill the man who had done you no wrong without thinking you had an account to render? Wait a while, however, and you will see him whom you've killed and who lies dead while you are alive and active becoming your accuser and levelling charges at you in a loud voice.

(9) "God said, 'Why have you done this?'"⁶ It is a deep meaning that emerges from this question: why have you perpetrated this (the text says)? Why have you committed this unholy deed, this loathsome act, this unpardonable offence, this intolerable folly, this strange and shocking murder, this first assault on the life of a human being at your hands? Why have you committed this awful and terrible crime, which has no sin to match it?

(10) "The voice of your brother's blood cries out to me from the earth." Surely I am not a human being, he is saying, that I hear only that voice that is expressed by mouth? I am God and can respond to someone crying out through his blood, lying on the ground somewhere. Notice how far the voice of this man's blood flies up, reaching from earth to heaven and spanning the expanse of heaven and the heavenly powers, and taking its place at the royal throne itself, lament-

6. Gen 4.10, in a LXX variant that asks for the reason rather than the fact.

ing the murder and condemning the unholy crime. "The voice of your brother's blood cries out to me from the earth." Surely, he is saying, you haven't committed this outrage against a stranger or foreigner? It is against your own brother, who did you no wrong. But perhaps my favor gave rise to this murder in you, and since you could not fight me, you spent your unbridled fury on him. For this reason, assuredly, I will impose such a punishment on you that the outrage will never be lost in oblivion, and the penalty inflicted on you will have as its purpose, that what happened to you will be a lesson for everyone coming later.

(11) [162] "And now," since you have done this, have put into effect what you knew to be wrong and have rushed headlong into murder under the impulse of terrible envy, "you shall be cursed from the earth."⁷ Do you see the difference in this curse, dearly beloved? Don't pass it by heedlessly; instead, from the magnitude of the curse come to realize the excess of the outrage. From the difference in the curse you can, if you are of a mind, understand how much greater this sin was than the transgression of the first formed human being. In that case, remember, he said, "Cursed shall be the soil as you till it,"⁸ and it was on the earth he poured out the curse, to show his care for the human being, whereas in this case, where the crime was deadly, the outrage lawless and the deed unpardonable, he receives the curse in person: "You shall be cursed from the earth," the text says, remember. You see, since Cain perpetrated practically the same evil as the serpent, which like an instrument served the devil's purposes, and as the serpent introduced mortality by means of deceit, in like manner Cain deceived his brother, led him out into open country, raised his hand in armed assault against him and committed murder. Hence, as he said to the serpent, "Cursed are you beyond all the wild animals of the earth,"⁹ so to Cain, too, when he committed the same evil as the serpent. In other words, just as the devil was moved by hatred

7. Gen 4.11.

8. Gen 3.17.

9. Gen 3.14.

and envy, being unable to bear the ineffable kindnesses done the human being right from the outset, and under the impulse of hatred rushed headlong into the deception that introduced death, so too Cain saw the Lord kindly disposed to his brother, and under the impulse of hatred rushed headlong into murder. Hence the Lord says to him, "‘You shall be cursed from the earth.’" You shall be cursed, he says, even on that very earth "‘which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand.’" You shall be cursed on the earth, he is saying, which has been forced to receive a shower of this blood so defiled and shed by such an impious hand.

(12) Sacred Scripture then interprets the curse more clearly in the words, "‘When you till the soil, it will not proceed to yield its strength to you.’"¹⁰ A remarkable kind of punishment, and a heavy weight of indignation: You will endure the labor, he is saying, you will make every effort on your part and till the soil stained with such blood, but far from experiencing any reward of your many labors you will find all the exertion you expend will be to no avail. Nor will the effects of punishment stop there; instead, "‘You will live in lament and trepidation on the earth.’"¹¹ Once again this is a severe form of punishment, constant lament and trepidation. In other words, because you improperly applied the strength of your body, he is saying, and the vigor of your limbs, for this reason I sentence you to endless shuddering and trembling so that you may have in person not only a constant awareness and reminder of this unholy deed, but also that everyone may see you and learn from this sight, as though by some voice shouting aloud, not to risk similar outrage lest they suffer the same retribution; so the punishment inflicted on you may prove a lesson to everyone never again to defile the earth with such blood. Precisely for this reason I will not impose an abrupt end to your days, lest the event be lost in oblivion; instead, I will cause you to endure a life more distressing than

10. Gen 4.12.

11. Gen 4.12b, where the LXX translates the Hebrew rather differently from our modern versions, relying perhaps more on logic than linguistics.

death so that you may learn from your very labors what it is you have perpetrated.

(13) "Cain said to the Lord: 'My guilt is too great for me to be forgiven.'"¹² There is an important lesson to be learnt here, if we are ready to pay attention, and one very useful for our salvation. "Cain said: 'My guilt is too great for me to be forgiven.'" Behold the complete confession. [163] In other words, such is the sin committed by me, he is saying, that I cannot be pardoned. Someone may say, Behold he has confessed, and confessed with great precision—but all to no avail, dearly beloved: the confession comes too late. You see, he should have done this at the right time when he was in a position to find mercy from the Judge. Remember now, I ask you, what I was saying a short time ago, that on that dread day and before that impartial tribunal each of us will repent of our sins, seeing before our eyes those fearful punishments and the ineluctable chastisements—but all to no purpose, as we have run out of time. In other words, it is before punishment is imposed that penance is appropriate and is so marvellously efficacious. Hence I beseech you, when this remarkable remedy is able to take effect, let us then take advantage of it, and while we are still in this life let us apply the healing power coming from repentance; and let us learn for sure that it will be of no avail to us to repent after the show is over and the time for the contest has passed.

(14) Let us, however, return to our theme. You see, when Cain was asked by the Lord, "'Where is your brother Abel?'" that was the time for him to confess his fault, fall on his knees, pray and ask pardon. At that point, however, he rejected the healing, whereas now, after the sentence, after all was over, after the accusation was levelled at him in a loud voice by the blood that had been shed, he made his confession only to gain nothing from it. That is why the inspired author also said, "He who accuses himself at the beginning of the speech is in the right."¹³ Accordingly, had Cain anticipated the Lord's accusation, perhaps he would have been granted

12. Gen 4.13.

13. Prov 18.17.

some mercy on account of the Lord's unlimited goodness. I mean, there is no sin, no matter how grave, that can exceed his mercy provided we demonstrate our repentance at the proper time and beg pardon. "Cain said, 'My guilt is too great for me to be forgiven'"—an adequate confession, but too late.

(15) Cain said, "'If today you drive me from the face of the earth and I must hide from your presence and live in lament and trepidation on the earth, it will happen that anyone finding me will kill me.'"¹⁴ See how these pitiable words lack all conviction for the reason both of their lateness and of their missing the right moment. He said, "'If today you drive me from the face of the earth and I must hide from your presence and live in lament and trepidation on the earth, it will happen that anyone finding me will kill me.'" If you have rendered me accursed on the earth, he is saying, and have personally abandoned me and consigned me to such terrible punishment that I lament and tremble, nothing in future will prevent me being destroyed by anyone who chances upon me, placed as I am in this situation and stripped of your favor. I will be an easy prey, he says, for anyone wanting to do away with me: I am no match for anyone, moving about as I do with limbs uncoordinated and tottering in all directions, and the fact that everyone knows that I have been stripped of your favor will make it easy for anyone who is so disposed to hasten to my destruction.

(16) What, then, is the response of the good and loving Lord? "The Lord God said, 'Not so.'"¹⁵ Do not think, he is saying, things will turn out like this: no one has the right to destroy you if he wants; on the contrary, I will bring you even more intense grief in the course of your life and I will leave you as a lesson for succeeding generations so that the sight of you will prove a [164] warning to them and no one will follow your example. "The Lord God said, 'Not so: anyone who kills Cain will have vengeance exacted on him seven-fold.'" Perhaps I have spoken many words and been the

14. Gen 4:14.

15. Gen 4:15, the LXX misreading the Hebrew "therefore".

cause of great bodily distress to you. But what am I to do? You see, I detect your interest and the keen desire you show, and so I want to move on to what remains and interpret it as well as I can. What is the sense of “‘he will have vengeance exacted on him sevenfold’”? Yet once more I am afraid of burying your memory of the text under the plethora of words and of being thought overpowering by you. Still, if you're not too tired, keep up the effort, and we will conclude our treatment of the foregoing text and thus bring our sermon to a close.

(17) “The Lord God said to him, ‘Not so: anyone who kills Cain will have vengeance exacted on him sevenfold.’ The Lord God put a mark on Cain lest anyone finding him do away with him.” Are you afraid, he says, of being done away with? Don't worry, this won't happen: the person who did it would render himself liable to a sevenfold punishment. This, then, is the reason I'm putting a mark on you, lest anyone do away with you unawares and render himself liable to such terrible punishment. We must, however, teach you more clearly how the person doing away with Cain becomes liable to a sevenfold punishment. Give me your attention, I beg you: we have in previous days often addressed your good selves, since it is the time for fasting and we enjoy such serenity; so now too, with our minds free of all upsetting ideas, if we didn't take the opportunity to understand the contents of Sacred Scripture precisely, when would we have another opportunity to grasp them? Hence I beg, implore and beseech you, as though grasping your knees, let us attend with mind alerted to these words so as to gain something fine and elevated, and thus make our way home.

(18) What, then, is the meaning of this phrase, “he will have vengeance exacted on him sevenfold”? First, the number seven has the sense of a multitude in Sacred Scripture, and you would often find it expressed that way, as for example, “The barren woman has borne seven children,”¹⁶ and other such passages. On the other hand, in this case there is refer-

16. 1 Sam 2.5.

ence to the magnitude of the outrage and the fact that what was committed by him is not one sin but seven sins and that for each sin there is need to undergo severe punishment. How then will we number them? By reasoning this way: first, the fact that he envied his brother for the favor he enjoyed from God—something that would have been sufficient, had it been the only factor involved, to have brought ruin upon him; second, that he envied his own brother; third, that he devised a plot against him; fourth, that he committed murder; fifth, that it was his brother he killed; sixth, that he was the first one to commit murder; seventh, that he lied to God.¹⁷

(19) Did you follow what was said, or would you like us to list them again from the beginning so as to know how each single one of them would have been sufficient to bring on him the severest punishment? After all, who would deem worthy of pardon the man who envied someone who enjoyed favor from God? Behold one sin, the worst and most inexcusable. Next, this one emerges as a worse sin, a brother being the object of envy without doing any wrong. Behold this one too in its turn is not just a casual sin. The third one likewise, his devising a plot to deceive his brother and entice him into the open country without respect for his own kind. The fourth sin is the murder itself that [165] he committed. Fifth, his killing his own brother, born of the same mother. Sixth, his being the first to introduce this kind of killing. Seventh, his presuming to lie to God in the question he asked him. Hence he says, "Anyone attempting to do away with you will render himself liable to a sevenfold punishment." So have no fear of that; see, I'm putting a mark on you lest anyone do away with you unawares. The remission of punishment for your whole life will be instructive for succeeding generations, and what you have committed alone, with no one else present, everyone will know about who sees your lament and trepidation as if you were shouting aloud by your bodily tremors and saying

17. Again Chrysostom the Antiochene is loath to let the literal—perhaps here even literalist—sense of Scripture be set aside in favor of a figurative sense, and hence this elaborate explanation.

and communicating to everyone: Let no one else be rash enough to do the terrible things I have done lest they receive the same terrible punishment.

(20) When we hear this, dearly beloved, let us not pass the words by heedlessly, nor have in mind only the opportunity of assembling here each day and enjoying a spiritual banquet; after all, listening alone is of no advantage without response in terms of action. Instead, let us consider how it was that Cain came to commit himself to this inexcusable and shocking sin, and the fact that he had been rash enough through envy to commit such a crime against the man who had never tried to do him any wrong—or rather to commit murder against his own brother; and instead of simply avoiding evil conduct let us rather take care lest it be done to others. After all, that person is really in dire straits who is bent on bringing his neighbor down. For proof that this is true, notice in this case, I ask you, who is in dire straits—the killer, or the killed? Clearly the killer. Why? Because while the killed even up to the present time is on everyone's lips as a model, is praised and honored as the first witness to truth, as blessed Paul also says, "Though dead Abel still speaks,"¹⁸ the killer on the contrary passed a life more miserable than all other people in those days, and since then has become an object of reproach to everyone and is held out as an example of a man loathsome in God's sight and cursed by Sacred Scripture.

(21) This is true of their lot in this present life which they share together; but of the fate they must meet in the life to come and of the retribution they must receive each individually for his own deeds at the hands of the just Judge, what account could do justice to that, the good or the opposite? No words could describe it, the joyful or the melancholy. In Abel's case, after all, the kingdom of heaven, everlasting tabernacles, the choirs of patriarchs, prophets and apostles and the throng of all the saints will welcome him as one destined to reign for unending ages with Jesus Christ the King, God

18. Heb 11.4—though that epistle gives Abel pride of place for witness to faith rather than truth, and it is through his faith that Abel still speaks.

and the only-begotten Son of God; whereas in Cain's case, the hell of fire and all the other undying torments will receive him as a victim for endless ages along with those who have committed similar crimes to his, and in fact to the degree that greater punishment is decreed by the common Lord of all against those who later were ensnared in these shameful passions. Listen, after all, to Paul's words: "As many as sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law"¹⁹—that is, they will receive a less severe [166] punishment on account of not having the Law as warning and correction. "As many as sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law": these on the contrary, he is saying, who despite the assistance of the Law committed the same crimes as the others, will fear punishments that are severer and less tolerable. And rightly so, because neither the Law nor the sight of others subjected to such evils brought them to their senses or to a sounder frame of mind.

(22) Hence I beseech you that at least from this present time onwards we learn the lesson for ourselves from the example of others and correct our lives in response to the Lord's instruction and in compliance with his laws; and that the thoughts of our mind not be dominated by hatred, envy, bodily satisfaction, this life's glory and power, pleasures of the palate, or any other unsuitable desire. Instead, let us purge ourselves of every uncleanness or disorder of this life, bid farewell to the most shameful and unseemly passions, and hasten towards that blessed life and those ineffable goods prepared by God for those who love him. May it be our good fortune to be deemed worthy of this, thanks to the grace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, power and honor, now and forever, for all ages of ages. Amen.

19. Rom 2.12—though Paul is not really supporting the distinction Chrysostom is making.

HOMILY 20

*"Now, Cain left God's presence and settled in the land of Nod opposite Eden,"*¹ and following verses.



OME [166] NOW, let us once more today take up the thread of the reading and apply to you the teaching from this passage, and let us deliver the customary discourse to you from the book of blessed Moses—or, rather, from the sayings of the Spirit which the divine grace has taught us through the mouth of Moses.² But, so that the sermon may be clearer to you, it behooves your good selves to recall what has been said already and where we concluded our instruction so that today we may be able to resume it at that point and so touch on the opening words of the reading. You know, of course, that we dealt with the subject of Abel, and showed from the events themselves and from the things which each brother brought as offerings to the Lord how the knowledge of what must be done and what must not be done is implanted in our nature, and the fact that the Creator of all made us independent, that in every case he rewards or condemns us on the basis of intention (on this account, after all, one brother's offering was rejected while the other's gifts were accepted), that thereupon Cain under the impulse of envy rushed headlong to the murder of his brother, that despite this unholy crime and God's wish to summon him to confession of his sins he did not accept this kind of healing remedy but added mendacity to this abominable crime and

1. Gen 4.16.

2. One of Chrysostom's frequent statements of his clear conviction of the fact of inspiration of the biblical authors. His thinking on the charism and process of biblical inspiration, however, as with other Fathers, is conspicuously missing. See my article, "terminology."

thus drew upon himself that severe punishment, that he rendered himself stripped and robbed of grace from above and thus remains a salutary lesson for everyone in later times, and that through the sentence he received he addresses himself to the whole human race as if to cry out in loud tones, Let none of you ever attempt anything like this in case you incur these penalties. Do you see the love of the Lord, how by means of the punishment inflicted on Cain he intended not only to bring him to his senses [167] but also to teach everyone in future to avoid in every way this brazen exploit?

(2) Come, let us now press on to what follows and see what it is today as well this blessed author describes to us, inspired as he is by the force of the Spirit. When Cain received the sentence, remember, "He left God's presence," the text says. What does that mean, "He left God's presence"? In other words, on account of that abominable crime he was stripped of the patronage God afforded. "And he settled in the land of Nod opposite Eden." He tells us also the place where he made his dwelling in the future, and teaches us how even Cain did not live far from the garden, for the reason that by being opposite it he might have a constant reminder also of what had happened to his father because of the Fall and also of the magnitude of the crimes committed by him—though he had failed to come to his senses with the punishment inflicted on his father and had himself received terrible punishment. Now, the very place where he dwelt was an unrelenting reminder, not only to him alone but to all future generations, of tossing and trembling. The word Nod, you see, is Hebrew, translated as "tossing".³ So in order that he should find the accusation even in the very place as though recorded on a bronze monument, God settled him there.

(3) Then it says, "Cain had intercourse with his wife; she conceived and gave birth to Enoch."⁴ Since they were mortal, it was fitting that they should give all their attention to propagation of children. But perhaps someone may say: How is it

3. Speiser, *Genesis*, 31, suggests "wandering" would have been closer; but Chrysostom's lack of Hebrew did not allow him to question his LXX text.

4. Gen 4.17.

that Cain had a wife when Sacred Scripture nowhere makes mention of another woman? Don't be surprised at this, dearly beloved: it has so far given no list of women anywhere in a precise manner; instead, Sacred Scripture while avoiding superfluous detail mentions the males in turn, though not even all of them, telling us about them in rather summary fashion when it says that so-and-so had sons and daughters and then he died. So it is likely in this case too that Eve gave birth to a daughter after Cain and Abel, and Cain took her for wife. You see, since it was in the beginning and the human race had to increase from then on, it was permissible to marry their own sisters.

(4) This, of course, is the reason why Scripture leaves us to presuppose what was involved when it reports the event in these words only, "Cain had intercourse with his wife; she conceived and gave birth to Enoch, and (Cain) was the founder of a city named after his son Enoch."⁵ See how they are now instructed little by little: having become mortal, they want their memory to be kept unfading both through their offspring and from the names of places which they call after their children. Someone may say quite rightly that all such were reminders of their sins and the loss of that glory which both Adam and Eve had the good fortune to enjoy and so had no need of reminders, being superior to them.

(5) "To Enoch was born Gaidad," the text says, "Gaidad begot Maleleel, Maleleel begot Mathusala, Mathusala begot Lamech."⁶ See how he skimmed through the genealogies, this blessed author mentioning only the males and making no mention of the females. Instead, just as he said in the case of Cain, that "he had intercourse with his wife" without teaching us anything about where he got his wife, so in just the same way here too he says again, "Lamech took to himself two [168] wives: the name of one was Ada and the name of the other Sella. Ada gave birth to Jobel," the text says; "he was the father of those who dwell in tents and keep cattle. His

5. *Ibid.*, where Chrysostom's variant of the LXX has been made to read less tautologically than the Hebrew and other LXX MSS.

6. Gen 4.18.

brother's name was Joubal; he was the inventor of the harp and the lyre."⁷ Note the precision of Scripture; it taught us the names of the children born of Lamech's wife and the occupations they had, as well as the fact that whereas one devoted himself to keeping cattle, the other invented the harp and the lyre. "Now, Sella in turn gave birth to Thobel," the text goes on; "he was a metalsmith, working in copper and iron."⁸ Again it indicated to us the occupation of the child born of Sella, namely, that he took on the trade of copper-smith. See how stage by stage the things necessary for the well-being of the human race were provided for. First, Cain named the city founded by him after the son born to him. Then, of the sons born of the wives of Lamech, one devoted himself to keeping cattle while another took on the work of coppersmith and the third invented the harp and the lyre. "Thobel's sister was Noeman." What is the meaning of this strange and surprising statement? Well, now for the first time it refers to females, making mention of one by name. This was not done idly or to no purpose; instead, the blessed author has done this to draw our attention to something lying hidden.

(6) What it is we will keep in store for another occasion, and for the present press on to what follows. The sequel is, in fact, no casual addition, but rather calls for a great deal of effort and very precise interpretation for us to be in a position to discern everything with clarity and gain for ourselves considerable benefit from the text. "Lamech said," the text in fact goes on, "to his wives Ada and Sella, 'Listen to my voice, wives of Lamech, hearken to my words: I killed a man for wounding me, and a young man for striking me. On Cain fell sevenfold vengeance, but on Lamech seventy times sevenfold.'⁹" Apply your attention to the utmost, I beseech you,

7. Gen 4.19–21, the LXX describing Jubal somewhat differently from the Hebrew.

8. Gen 4.22.

9. Gen 4.23–24, where the LXX misinterprets the Hebrew: despite 4.15, Cain is now seen as the one *on* whom—not *for* whom—vengeance is taken, *ekdikein* . . . *ek* now being employed as elsewhere by the LXX (Num 31.2;

put aside all worldly thoughts, and let us study these words with precision so that nothing may escape us but rather we should proceed to their deepest meaning and be able to light upon the treasure concealed in these brief phrases. "Lamech said to his wives Ada and Sella," the text says, "'Listen to my voice, wives of Lamech, hearken to my words.'" Consider at once, I ask you, from the outset how much benefit this man gained from the punishment inflicted on Cain; not only does he not await accusation from someone else to the effect that he has been guilty of this sin or some worse one, but, without anyone's accusing him or censuring him, he confesses his own guilt, admits his crimes, and outlines to his wives the magnitude of his sin, as if to fulfil the proverb of the inspired writer, "He who accuses himself at the beginning of the speech is in the right."¹⁰

(7) You see, confession is of the greatest efficacy for correction of faults. Thus, as proceeding to deny guilt after committing sin proves worse than the sins themselves—which was the condition of that man who killed his brother and who when questioned by the loving God did not merely decline to confess his crime but even dared to lie to God and thus caused his life to be lengthened—accordingly Lamech, [169] when he fell into the same sins, arrived at the conclusion that denial would only lead to his receiving a severer punishment, and so he summoned his wives, without anyone's accusing or charging him, made a personal confession of his sins to them in his own words, and by comparing what he had done to the crimes committed by Cain he limited the punishment coming to him.

(8) Do you see the Lord's care for us, how even punishments are the occasion of his love, and that his display of love does not stop short at the person receiving the punishment but results in an efficacious antidote for others, provided they are of a mind to take advantage of its salutary assistance? I

¹ Sam 24.12). There is some logic in this: the Yahwist, by including "the Song of the Sword" here, has himself thus transformed Cain into an *agent* of vengeance—so perhaps the LXX compromises.

¹⁰. Prov 18.17.

mean, how on earth, tell me, was Lamech otherwise brought to such confession except by having the constant reminder of Cain's fate to goad his thinking? "He said," the text reads, "'Listen to my voice, and hearken to my words.'" See how he institutes proceedings against himself and issues them with a summons in this fashion so that they won't idly accept what he has to say. You see, the sentence, "'Listen to my voice and hearken to my words,'" was meant by him to imply the following: Apply your attention to the utmost, he is saying, and heed with precision what I am about to say; I am not going to talk to you about incidental matters—instead, I will reveal to you hidden things which no one else knows about except myself alone and that unsleeping eye, fear of which makes me eager and anxious to lay plainly before you the crimes committed by me and the punishments I have made myself liable to by my unholy deeds. "'I killed a man for wounding me,'" he says, "'and a young man for striking me. On Cain fell sevenfold vengeance, but on Lamech seventy times sevenfold.'" A remarkable saying—very remarkable, in fact—and a highly commendable attitude on the man's part: not only does he confess the crime and bring the murders he has committed out into the open, but also by comparing Cain's crimes with his he imposes the punishment on himself. What sort of excuse, he is saying in other words, could the man be deserving of who failed to come to his senses at the sight of his predecessor's punishment and was even responsible for a double homicide despite having such a recent reminder? "'I killed a man for wounding me,'" he says, "'and a young man for striking me.'" The men I did away with, he is saying, I wronged not to the same extent as I wronged myself. After all, on myself I inflicted an ineluctable punishment by committing crimes with no possibility of excuse. I mean, if Cain became liable to sevenfold punishment for one murder, I would be justly served to receive seventy times sevenfold punishment.¹¹ Why and on what account? Cain committed mur-

11. Chrysostom is clearly placing great importance on Lamech's song, as do modern literary critics, like G. Von Rad in his *Genesis* commentary (1972⁹;

der—fratricide, in fact—yet did so without previous experience of anyone doing so at any time previously or observing anyone else punished for such a crime or feeling the effects of such rage. All of this will be heaped on my head by way of punishment for my two crimes, because I had before my eyes Cain's crime and I could see his punishment to be so implacable and his failure to take so little warning from it. Hence, even if I incur seventy times sevenfold the punishment he did, I will still not discharge my account adequately.

(9) Do you see, dearly beloved, how God created our will independent, and just as we lose our footing if we don't take care, so too we observe what we need to, provided we have a mind to be on the watch? I mean, what was it, tell me, that coerced this man into making his confession? Nothing other than [170] conscience, that judge who is proof against influence. You see, when he fell into indifference and thus put into effect his evil endeavor, immediately conscience raised its voice in accusation of the magnitude of his sins and the extent of the punishment he thus rendered himself liable to. Sin, after all, is like this: before it comes into being and goes to work, it clouds the intellect and deceives the mind; but once it has run its course, it then makes its own stupidity patent to us, the brief and stupid pleasure being replaced in us by unremitting pain, robbing us of peace of mind, and covering the victim in confusion. The loving Lord, you see, appointed us a prosecutor of this kind who would never rest but would constantly be at hand to raise his voice and demand punishment for our sins. This you would see clearly in daily events themselves: the lecher, the adulterer or the person who com-

ET London 1972, 111f)—but, partly by preference, partly because of the LXX's misreading of the Hebrew regarding the object of vengeance, Chrysostom's interest in the text is moral, not dogmatic in the way Von Rad sees it: "The Song of Lamech is the third section of the primeval history which the narrator emphasizes. It is a story of the increase in sin and the more and more profound disturbance of the original orders of life with which it goes hand in hand. First, the Fall, then fratricide, and now the execution of vengeance . . ." The mistranslation of the LXX, of course, robs it of this dogmatic significance; but Chrysostom still finds Lamech a figure of considerable moral significance, even if he is no longer the agent but the object of vengeance.

mits any other such excesses, even if he succeeds in escaping everyone's notice, doesn't remain at peace in that condition, but has this savage prosecutor with him and so he is afraid of suspicions, he trembles at shadows, at people who know and people who don't know, and so he suffers perpetual turmoil of spirit and conflicting waves of emotion. Neither is sleep enjoyable for such a person but rather plagued by fear and terror; the table brings no delight, nor can conversation with friends bring such a person out of his depression or dispel his pressing concern. Instead, after that stupid behavior of his he goes about as if he had a public executioner at hand to flay and beat him incessantly, and even if no one is aware of his crime, he suffers those intolerable punishments, having become his own prosecutor and judge.

(10) On the other hand, should a person guilty of such faults have a mind to take advantage of the assistance of conscience, as behooves him, and hasten to make confession of his sins, reveal his ulcer to the physician who cures without reproaching, and in private communion with him without anyone else's knowing tell all in detail, he will achieve a rapid mending of his ways. Confession, you see, means the removal of sins. After all, if in fact the man in question, Lamech, did not shrink from confessing to his own wives the murders committed by him, what excuse would we have if we were not prepared to make a clean breast of our sins to the one who knows them all in detail? Surely it's not because of ignorance that he wants to hear about them! Because he is not ignorant of them, he looks for confession from us while knowing everything before it happens and yet wanting us to have a sense of our faults through confession and to demonstrate gratitude on our part. There won't be the need to outlay expense in this case, will there? there won't be the need to set out on a long journey, will there? this cure won't involve pain and suffering, will it? No, it involves no expense, no suffering, but offers an immediate cure. The Lord, you see, grants remedies for wounds in this way according to the disposition of the patient. Consequently, let the person who is minded to return to health more quickly and be cured of the ulcers of

his spirit approach the physician soberly, and cutting himself off from all worldly concerns let him shed hot tears, give every evidence of insistence, demonstrate a resolute faith and have confidence in the physician's healing arts; he will thus straightway enjoy good health.

(11) Do you see the physician's prodigality which excels the loving concern of all human fathers? It is not something burdensome and demanding that he requires of us, is it? No, simply heartfelt contrition, a lull in our wild ideas, confession of sins, earnest recourse to him; [171] then he not merely rewards us with the curing of our wounds and renders us cleansed of our sins, but also puts to rights the person who beforehand had been weighed down with countless burdens of sin. O the greatness of his love! O the extent of his goodness! When the sinner confesses his sins and begs forgiveness and gives evidence of carefulness in the future, God immediately declares him law-abiding. For clear proof of this, listen to the prophet's words: "Take the initiative in declaring your transgressions so that you may be declared upright."¹² He did not simply say, "Declare your transgressions," but added, "Take the initiative," that is to say, don't wait for someone to accuse you, nor let the prosecutor anticipate you—beat him to the punch by having the first say, so as to deprive the prosecutor of a voice.

(12) Do you see the judge's loving kindness? In the case of human courts, whenever anyone admitted to doing this and anticipated proof of the charges by confessing his crimes, he would perhaps be in a position to escape torture and the torments accompanying it, and even if the case came before a lenient judge he would indubitably receive a sentence of death. In the case of the loving God, on the contrary, the physician of our souls, we meet with ineffable goodness and a liberality exceeding all description. What I mean is this: if we steal a march on our adversary—I mean the devil—who on that dread day will take his stand against us, and already in this present life before our entry into the court we confess

12. Isa 43.26.

our crimes, take the initiative in speaking, and turn accusers against ourselves, we will encourage the Lord not only to reward us with freedom from our sins but also to reckon us among the number of the upright. You see, the man in question, Lamech, made a clean breast of his deeds and condemned himself without the advantage of any law passed to teach him, without having heard any inspired authors, and without any other encouragement except the conviction of his own crimes arising from the judgment rooted in his own nature. So how could we meet with any excuse for not having revealed our wounds to the Lord in all eagerness and received from him healing of them? If we haven't done it now when it is the time for fasting, when we have such serenity of thought, when all indulgence is put aside, at what time will we be able to take stock of our behavior? Hence I beseech you to be ever sober and alert, and spend all this present life with a view to being able by your diligence to avoid that intolerable punishment and keep out of the fire of hell. At this time in particular, however, ought we to do this with all eagerness when on account of the season for fasting we have the advantage of more abundant and insistent teaching.

(13) "Now, Adam had intercourse with his wife Eve; she conceived, bore a son and gave him the name Seth, saying, 'God has raised up for me another child in place of Abel, whom Cain killed.'"¹³ Sacred Scripture developed the genealogy as far as Lamech, and then went back to Adam and his wife, and said, "Now, Adam had intercourse with his wife; she conceived, bore a son and gave him the name Seth, saying, 'God has raised up for me another child in place of Abel, whom Cain killed.'"¹⁴ "She bore a son," the text says, "and gave him the name Seth"; [172] the mother was not content with giving the name, but added, "'God has raised up for me another child in place of Abel, whom Cain killed.'" Notice also the mother, how through the name of the child she bore she ensures a constant reminder of that evil deed, and, so that future generations may be in a position to know of the crime

13. Gen 4.25.

committed by Cain, she says, “in place of Abel, whom Cain killed.” The comment of a grieving spirit, upset at the memory of what had happened, and while thankful for her new child, yet by the name she gave it erecting a monument, as it were, to her other son. After all, it was no chance sorrow he brought to his parents in raising his hand against his brother and stretching him on the ground before their eyes, a lifeless corpse, whom they had bred and cherished. I mean, if Adam received the sentence, “‘Dust you are, and to dust you are to return,’”¹⁴ and “‘On the day you eat from it you will truly die,’”¹⁵ still the meaning of the sentence lay in the words alone for the time being and he had no awareness up to that point of what death looked like. Cain, on the contrary, took the initiative against his brother out of hatred, let loose against Abel the rancor that had been gnawing at his vitals, and thus provided his parents with a dreadful spectacle to contemplate. For this reason, assuredly, the mother, who had scarcely lifted her head and was able only at this late stage to find some consolation for that unbearable grief in the birth of a son, offered thanks to the Lord and immortalized the crime of fratricide, thus also inflicting on him the severest of punishments by ensuring the unfailing remembrance of what had been done by him.

(14) Do you see what a terrible evil sin is? how it brings those who commit it into shame and disgrace? do you see how through it he was rendered bereft of grace from above and became an object of mockery for all to see? do you see how even to his parents, committed though they were by nature itself to loving their children, he was transformed into an object of revulsion because of that evil deed? Let us accordingly, I beseech you, shun the sin that brings such evils upon us, and let us choose virtue so that we may win favor from on high and avoid punishment.

(15) “A son was born to Seth,” the text goes on; “he gave him the name Enosh. He it was who hoped to invoke the name of the Lord God.”¹⁶ See how people are now taught to

14. Gen 3.19.

15. Gen 2.17.

16. Gen 4.26, where the LXX departs from the Hebrew text in some

incorporate an expression of their own gratitude in the names of their children: Seth, the text says, had a son and gave him the name Enosh; then, out of a wish to explain to us the significance of the name, Sacred Scripture adds, "He it was who hoped to invoke the name of the Lord God."¹⁷ You see, from this person onwards the blessed author is on the point of beginning the genealogy, having dismissed the memory of Cain and also of those who were descended from him up to Lamech; since he had by the evil of his course of action besmirched the prerogative granted to him by nature—I mean that of firstborn—he is expunged from the list along with his descendants. Now Seth, on the contrary, is accorded this distinction—something he did not enjoy by nature—on account of the gratitude in his course of action, and for the future the position of firstborn is transferred to him, if not by nature, at least by the attitude revealed in his course of action, and those descended from him are accorded a place in the genealogy. Just as the son is called Enosh through invoking the name of the Lord God, so too those who continue the line from him in future are accorded the same name. Hence this blessed author concludes the narrative at this stage and then begins another.

(16) [173] Lest, however, we launch into this narrative and prolong the instruction to great length, let us, like this blessed author, bring the sermon to a close at this point and hold over till next time (God willing) the explanation of what follows. Just for the time being, however, I want to bring this point to the attention of your good selves so that you can reap some benefit from what has been said by us and examine yourselves daily as to what you have gained from this teaching, and what from that, and not simply take in our words with your ears

respects—without solving its historical difficulty about the beginning of the worship of Yahweh, which the E and P narratives in *Exodus* attribute to the time of Moses.

17. Chrysostom seems anxious to find some etymological connection between the name "Enosh" (Hebrew for "mankind") and the worship of the Lord (Yahweh, in fact, though word-for-word rendering as *Kyrios* results in a loss of this point). His argument, however, suggests he is reading some other sense than the Hebrew into the proper name.

but also rivet them in your mind and make the firm recollection of them your constant concern. In fact, I want you not simply to be content with them yourselves but also to become teachers of others so as to be able to exhort them as well, doing so not only with words but also through your actions instructing your neighbor in the practice of virtue. I mean, consider, I ask you, that if you want to gain some little advantage from coming along here each day and achieve the correction of the passions that handicap you, you will ascend little by little to the very pinnacle of virtue. You see, we will not cease addressing you each day and making your ears ring with talk of the noblest way of life so that you may eradicate those deadly passions—I mean anger, envy and jealousy. After all, once these have been removed, it will be easier for the obsession with material goods to find a remedy; and once the obsession with material goods has in turn ceased, those improper thoughts and shameful desires will with greater security be suppressed. Avarice, you see, is the root of all evils;¹⁸ so if we chop out the root and pull it up from the very bottom, it will be easier for us to get the better of the branches.

(17) The very peak of evil, after all, and the summit (so to say) of sin is insatiable desire for possessions; if we were prepared to overcome it, there would be no obstacle to our escaping this obsession and, by so doing, eradicating and expelling all deadly passions. Don't think it is any great challenge to despise possessions. I mean, when I consider that many people, through an empty and mindless esteem for them, expend great amounts of money to no good effect but only to win the approval of common and often paltry people, an esteem which fades by evening but before the day is over brings countless troubles upon them; and that others, on the other hand, are among the number who are overcome by pagan deception, in their turn yearning after the good opinion of people and setting much store by it, letting all their possessions go, keeping for themselves only a bit of a cloak and

18. 1 Tim 6.10.

a staff, passing their whole life in this fashion and choosing to endure all this trouble and distress for the sake of people's good opinion—when, then, I ponder all this, I know not what excuse or allowance will be accorded us for not bearing to give up the least of those things for the sake of the command given us by God or for the sake of that glory that does not die and has no end. Instead, we prove worse than those people and fail to understand the difference between such things, because while they give them up for the sake of the mindless esteem of their peers, [174] we for our part often choose not to share the slightest thing with the needy even for the sake of our Lord, the supplier of our possessions, who promises us those gifts beyond all telling.

(18) How will our eyes bear to look upon the Judge if we have so neglected this simple command? I mean, surely I'm not recommending you to throw all your possessions away. Make the most of every time of prosperity, satisfy every need, and what is over and above put to good use by distributing to those who are hungry or frozen with the cold, and so send it ahead to your homeland by their hand so as to take advantage of it there before long. These people, you see, will be in a particular position to help you in transferring your goods there so that when you arrive you may find everything arranged to your advantage and you may enjoy greater credit there, seeing your riches multiplied by your agents—or, rather, by God's loving kindness. After all, the transaction involves no problems, does it? It causes no worry or concern, does it? You have no need of carriers for the transfer, or of guards or anything else like that; no brigand or robber infests that route to prey upon the cargo you send. Instead, whatever you put into the hands of the poor, you put into safe custody, God's own hand. This hand, of course, is proof against harm and provides protection for your goods, and when you arrive in your homeland, in addition to the restoration of your goods he will commend and reward you, and establish you in complete comfort and enjoyment.

(19) Accordingly, let us, I beseech you, pour out savings to provide for the poor, and sow seed in good time for the pur-

pose of reaping a harvest at the proper season and not having vain regrets later through putting off the present opportunity. I mean, surely the loving Lord has not blessed you with greater benefits for this reason, that you should squander what has been given you only on your own needs and secrete the rest in safes and chests? It was not for that purpose, but rather that in accordance with the apostolic exhortation your surplus should be used to meet the needs of others. Perhaps your enjoyment extends even beyond what is needful and you spend much money on delicacies, clothing and other sorts of luxurious living, and your generosity extends even to servants and animals, whereas the poor person asks you for none of these things except to assuage his hunger and provide him with his pressing needs and daily bread so as to survive and not perish. You should not desist from doing this, nor think that often you are suddenly robbed and on the point of losing all you have amassed and in some cases sharing it with enemies and rivals; in fact, all the sins, through which you have amassed these things, you take with you as you pass on. What will you then say on that dread day? What excuse will you give for having managed your salvation with such indifference?

(20) So take my advice, and while you still have the opportunity, distribute your superfluous possessions so as to make sure of your salvation there and guarantee a dividend by way of eternal bliss. May it be the good fortune of all of us to enjoy this, thanks to the grace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, power and honor, now and forever, for ages of ages. Amen.

pose of reaping a harvest at the proper season and not having vain regrets later through putting off the present opportunity. I mean, surely the loving Lord has not blessed you with greater benefits for this reason, that you should squander what has been given you only on your own needs and secrete the rest in safes and chests? It was not for that purpose, but rather that in accordance with the apostolic exhortation your surplus should be used to meet the needs of others. Perhaps your enjoyment extends even beyond what is needful and you spend much money on delicacies, clothing and other sorts of luxurious living, and your generosity extends even to servants and animals, whereas the poor person asks you for none of these things except to assuage his hunger and provide him with his pressing needs and daily bread so as to survive and not perish. You should not desist from doing this, nor think that often you are suddenly robbed and on the point of losing all you have amassed and in some cases sharing it with enemies and rivals; in fact, all the sins, through which you have amassed these things, you take with you as you pass on. What will you then say on that dread day? What excuse will you give for having managed your salvation with such indifference?

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HOMILY 21

*"This is the book about the origin of human beings. On the day God made Adam, in God's image he made him; male and female he made them. He gave them the name Adam on the day he made them."*¹



ONDERFUL [175] AND BEYOND TELLING, dearly beloved, is the treasure in the words read just now. I realize that for their part many people take one look at a list of names, pay attention only to the surface of the text, and judge that the words contain nothing more than simply a list of names. For my part, on the contrary, I beg you all not to pass heedlessly by the contents of Holy Scripture. I mean, there is nothing in the writings at this point which does not contain a great wealth of thought; after all, since the blessed authors composed under the inspiration of the divine Spirit, on that account they hold concealed within them great treasure because written by the Spirit. Don't be surprised if in the list of names I guarantee to show you a great wealth of thought hidden there. You see, there is not even a syllable or even one letter contained in Scripture which does not have great treasure concealed in its depths.² Hence we must be guided by grace from above and accept the enlightenment of

1. Gen 5.1–2, where the priestly editor of the Hebrew text begins his book of generations, or record of Adam's line. The LXX, which before this point has failed to respect the difference between Hebrew *adam* with article and without it to distinguish "human being" from "Adam" (as a proper name) and has preferred the proper name, strangely reverses its pattern in 5.1, still against the Hebrew. Chrysostom's own text here also omits the blessing in 5.2.

2. A classic statement of Chrysostom's principle of the precision, *akribeia*, of Scripture—a principle he adheres to not just by citing it but by examining carefully minuscule items in the text, even down to syllables and letters as he claims (cf. Homily 39 on Abraham's name). See notes 11 and 13 below, and my article, "*Akribeia*."

the Holy Spirit, and only then approach the divine sayings. That is to say, Sacred Scripture does not call into play human wisdom for the understanding of its writings, but the revelation of the Spirit, so that we may learn the true meaning of its contents and draw from it a great benefit.³ After all, if in daily affairs the writings composed by human beings frequently become corrupt through the passage of time, judging by the date mentioned at the beginning of the text, and still contain great significance in even a single syllable, so much the more in the case of the Holy Scriptures composed by the Holy Spirit can we find this, provided we are alert and do not rush heedlessly on but sharpen our responses and consider everything precisely, proving ourselves no worse than people demonstrating a like enthusiasm for material things.

(2) To draw a comparison with people digging for metal ore: they don't stop short at its first appearance; instead, when they get down to great depth and are in a position to collect nuggets of gold, they expend much effort and vigor in separating them from the soil, and despite that great labor they find only some slight consolation for their pains.⁴ Still, even though they know they will gain little return in comparison with their trouble, in many cases despite long hours and much frustration and disappointment of their hopes, they don't give up at this stage: buoyed up by expectation they feel no effect of their efforts. So if they exhibit such zeal in regard to things that are corruptible and passing, to which is attached much uncertainty, much more should we exhibit a like, or even greater, enthusiasm in cases where the wealth is proof against theft and the treasure is not consumed nor is it

3. For Chrysostom not only are the author and text inspired but also the reader, if the inspired text is to be appreciated fully. One effect of such inspiration is that the reader is able to bring a like precision to his study of the precision of the text. See my *Inspiration*, pp. 108–121.

4. One of the several figures (probably not original, as we have seen from De Lubac's survey of similar patristic figures) Chrysostom employs at this point in his homilies to recommend Scripture to his congregation. It is perhaps his favorite figure, as it implies the painstaking study and careful search that exegesis was for the school of Antioch, and highlights as well the great rewards of scriptural reading.

possible for hopes to be disappointed, so that we may be able to have the good fortune to enjoy the object of our zeal, reap much benefit in the process, and in the knowledge of God's ineffable love prove to be grateful to our Lord and also render ourselves immune to the devil's wiles by winning favor from above.

(3) So come now, let us set forth the words read just now and examine each one precisely so as to take advantage of the customary instruction and thus make our way home. "This is the book about the origin of human beings," the text says. "On the day God made Adam, in God's image he [176] made him; male and female he made them. He gave them the name Adam on the day he made them." Notice, I ask you, the insight of this remarkable author—or rather, the instruction of the Holy Spirit. I mean, he utters everything to us under the influence of inspiration; he brought his tongue to the task, while the grace of the Spirit teaches everything clearly to us in our human condition by means of him.⁵ Consider, then, how he took the story back to the beginning, and intends to conduct his narrative all over again, so to say. Why and for what purpose? Well, he knew that those who were already in existence had given evidence of much ingratitude and had not even profited from the fate of the first formed human being but had descended into the very abyss of wickedness; his own son had immediately rushed into fratricide from a motive of envy, and had consequently received that most severe punishment, as we taught your good selves before. Then those after him in their turn, not even profiting from his punishment, involved themselves in worse evil, as you heard Lamech yesterday describing his own sin to his wives and

5. For Chrysostom the teaching of the human author is the teaching of the divine author: to find the latter, study the former. In this Chrysostom is as contemporary in his thinking as Vatican II's *Dei Verbum*—hence its acknowledgment of him. For details of the process of inspiration, however, Chrysostom is less helpful; his statement here could be taken to support a mechanical notion of dictation or even possession found among the Fathers, as emerges also from his commentary on Psalm 45 (PG 55, 183–85)—but that is a traditional patristic *locus* treated in the customary manner, so we are none the wiser.

specifying the penalty imposed on him. Finally, he saw bit by bit their wickedness increasing like an evil current about to wash completely over the body, so he stems the tide of wickedness, and doesn't even consider worthy of mention the succeeding generations from Cain to Lamech; instead, as though making a fresh start and wanting to sooth Adam and Eve's grief which the murderer had presumed to inflict upon them with the death of his brother by raising his hand against Abel, he thus begins his account with these words, "This is the book about the origin of human beings. On the day God made Adam, in God's image he made them; male and female he made them. He gave them the name Adam on the day he made them."

(4) Notice how he employs the same words as in the beginning to teach us that he did not even rate worth a mention from now on those generations turned reprobate; instead, he begins the genealogy from the recently born child—I mean Seth—so that from this fact also you may learn how much store God sets by human nature and how he abhors people of murderous intent. You see, he passes over mention of them as if they were people never brought into existence, thus showing us how terrible wickedness is and the fact that those who embrace it do the worst harm to themselves. Behold, in fact, on the one hand, these people are now removed from the list and are judged worthy only of such mention as to have their wickedness immortalized and to become a sober reminder for future generations. On the other hand, he who was unjustly done away with, put to death by a brother's hand, has been a byword on everyone's lips from that time till now, whose memory time has not erased nor has the other brother's accusation been excised; instead, day in day out one is praised to the skies, the other held in everlasting obloquy.

(5) Do you see how much harm is done by wickedness, how much power virtue has, and how one is crushed and dispelled no matter if it goes on the offensive and wages war, while the other, even if attacked and beset with countless insults, shines out the more brightly and resplendently on that account? It would be possible to demonstrate this to your good selves at

this point from many other examples that have occurred to like effect; [177] but lest we lose track for now of the theme we are developing, come now, let us take up again the words in question: "This is the book about the origin of human beings," the text says. "On the day God made Adam, in God's image he made him; male and female he made them. He gave them the name Adam on the day he made them." See how Sacred Scripture begins its account all over again to remind us of the extent of the esteem accorded the newly created human being. "On the day God made Adam," the text says, "in God's image he made him"—that is to say, he appointed him ruler of all visible things. This, after all, is the meaning of "in his image," in respect both of his control and his lordship.⁶ You see, just as the God of all has control of all things both visible and invisible, being Creator of everything as he is, so too after creating this rational being he intended him to have control of all visible things. Hence he accorded him also a spiritual being in his wish that he not see death for ever; but since through indifference he fell and transgressed the command given him, out of fidelity to his own loving kindness he did not turn away at this but while stripping him of immortality he placed this creature he had condemned to death in almost the same position of control. Then when the child born to him fell headlong into such awful wickedness and was the first to provide an example of murder, demonstrating that violent kind of death and displaying deep ingratitude by compounding homicide with guile, he decided to bring him to his senses with unremitting punishment so that he should not simply gain something personally from what happened to him but should also teach those coming later both the extent of his crimes and the excess of the impropriety.

(6) Since, however, through great indifference those descended from him gradually involved themselves in worse wickedness, he wanted to console Adam, so to say, for finding

6. See Homily 8, note 13 for mention of modern linguistic and archeological confirmation of Chrysostom's surmise as to the meaning of this key phrase.

himself so desolated not only by his own fall but also by Cain's crime which he saw with his own eyes. Not that they knew what death looked like, even if they had received the sentence: a twofold and threefold grief afflicted him because he saw death introduced into life for the first time, violent death at that, perpetrated by his own son, against his brother, of the same mother and same father as himself, one who had done him no ill. Accordingly, the loving God, wishing to bring him some consolation to compensate him for those griefs, provided him with another son, Seth, and in supplying adequate solace for him by that means he guarantees for the future the beginning of another line from him. Hence the blessed author made that opening remark, "This is the book about the origin of human beings."

(7) Then, notice the way, having promised to outline the origin of human beings, he continues, "Adam was two hundred and thirty years old."⁷ Was I not right in saying at the beginning that you can find nothing written idly or to no purpose in Sacred Scripture? I mean, behold here too how much precision this blessed [178] author employs. "Adam had a son of his own in his very image," he says, "and he named him Seth." In the case of the previous child—I mean Cain—on the contrary, he made no such comment except to suggest at the beginning his decline into evil. And rightly so: far from bearing the stamp of his father, he lost no time in taking to wickedness. In the present case, however, the text says, "A son of his own in his very image"—in other words, of the same ilk as his parent, preserving the same stamp of virtue, revealing the image of his father in his actions, capable of reversing by his own virtue the crime of his older brother. You see, it is not in reference to bodily features that Scripture is speaking to us here in the words, "A son of his own in his very image"; it is to do with the disposition of his soul, so that

7. Gen 5,3-5, with that notorious divergence by the LXX from the Masoretic Hebrew text in numbers of years typical also of the Samaritan Pentateuch at this place in the text. Strangely, as if shy of the textual discrepancies, Chrysostom omits reference to this matter of age with such promise for moral comment, and fixes on the names instead.

we may learn that he would not turn out like the other brother.

(8) For this reason, too, his mother in giving her son this name did so with thanks, attributing the birth of a son not to nature or to the process of birth but to the power of God. This it was, you see, that fertilized nature for giving birth, and so the text says, "She gave him the name Seth, saying, 'God has raised up for me another child in place of Abel, whom Cain killed.'"⁸ See the precision of the expression; she did not say, God has given me, but, "'God has raised up for me.'" Notice how in outline a premonition of the resurrection is already being suggested to us through this expression. I mean, she spoke as if to say, He has raised up this child for me in place of the fallen one. Even if that one was laid low at his brother's hand (she is saying), still the power of God has raised up this child in place of the fallen one. You see, since the time for the resurrection had not yet come, he raised up, not the fallen one, but another one in his place; hence she said, "'God has raised up for me another child in place of Abel, whom Cain killed.'" Do you see the woman's gratitude? Do you see the Lord's loving kindness? how he envisaged speedy consolation for them? Let us all imitate this, and attribute everything to grace from on high. You see, even if nature takes its course, it does so, not by its own power but in response to the direction of the Creator. Let women not be distressed when they have no children; instead, let them give evidence of a thankful disposition and have recourse to the Creator and direct their request to him, the Lord of nature, not attributing childbirth to the intercourse of the partners nor to any other source than the Creator of everything, who also brings our nature from non-being into being and is able to correct anything deficient. This is exemplified in Eve's making the fact of her grief an occasion for praise when she attributes everything to the Lord in the words, "'God has raised up for me another child in the place of Abel, whom Cain killed.'" Do you see how she was not merely not dis-

8. Gen 4.25.

tressed nor avoided uttering any pained remark (Sacred Scripture, after all, would not have passed it over, if in fact something of the sort had been said by her), but in accepting in noble fashion what had happened she was granted speedy comfort and displayed more intense gratitude by exalting the Lord's kindness?

(9) I mean, take note of the extent of the generosity the Lord gives evidence of on his part: he not only favors her with another son but also predicts at this point that he will be virtuous. "He had a son of his own," the text says, remember, "in his very image." For an immediate insight into the child's virtue, notice him also in turn demonstrating the piety [178] of his attitude in the name of his child. "A son was born to Seth," the text says; "he gave him the name Enosh. He it was who hoped to invoke the name of the Lord God."⁹ Do you notice his name, more resplendent than any other diadem, more brilliant than a robe of purple? What in fact could be more blessed than this man adorned by God himself with this title and employing it in place of a name?

(10) Do you see how, as I mentioned at the outset, in these mere names a great wealth of thought lies hidden? That is to say, they reveal in this case not simply the piety of the parents but also the great concern they had for their children, and how from the very beginning they instructed the children born to them through the names they gave them to cling to virtue. They didn't give names casually and by chance, like people today, who say, The child is to be called after his grandfather or greatgrandfather. The ancients, on the contrary, didn't act that way; instead, they took great pains to give such names to their children as not merely led to virtue those receiving them but proved instructive in complete wisdom for everybody else and for later generations too. This we will come to realize gradually as the sermon develops. Accordingly, let us neither give our children any old name, nor

9. Gen 4:26. As mentioned above at footnote 16 in Homily 20, Chrysostom's lack of Hebrew seems to be encouraging him to read more into the name than is justified, as if presuming the following (puzzling) sentence is etymological in basis.

bestow on them the names of grandfathers or greatgrand-fathers or people of distinguished lineage, but rather of holy men illustrious for their virtue who enjoyed great confidence in their relations with God. To be more exact, they should not trust lightly in those men's names, the parents or the children who have been given these names: a name that is unsupported by virtuous living is of no benefit—instead, it is necessary to rest one's hopes for salvation in the practice of virtue and not to become big-headed over a name or over one's connection with holy men or over anything other than the confidence that arises from one's own good deeds. To be more exact still, we should not become big-headed over this but rather humble and modest in the situation where we are able to amass great wealth of virtue. This, you see, is the way we will personally amass and store up wealth with security, and win favor from God. For this reason, after all, Christ also has said to his disciples, "When you do everything, say, 'We are unprofitable servants,'" ¹⁰ deflating their sense of importance in any respect and persuading them to be humble and not be conceited over their virtuous behavior but realize that the very greatest virtue of all is to be humble in the practice of virtue.

(11) Let us, however, return to the theme of the sermon and see the children born later. It is likely, you see, that as we proceed bit by bit we will find greater treasure, immense wealth beyond all telling. The text says: "Enosh (the son of Seth) was a hundred and ninety years old when he had a son, Kainan . . . ¹¹ Kainan had a son, Maleleel . . . ¹² Maleleel had a son, Jared . . . ¹³ Jared had a son, Enoch . . . ¹⁴ Enoch was a hundred and sixty five years old when he had a son Mathusala. Now, Enoch pleased God," the text says; "he lived two hundred years after having Mathusala, and had other sons and daughters; Enoch's lifespan was three hundred and sixty five years. Enoch pleased God, and he was not to be found

10. Luke 17.10.

12. Gen 5.12.

14. Gen 5.18.

11. Gen 5.9.

13. Gen 5.15.

because God had taken him away.”¹⁵ Wasn’t I right in saying that as [180] we proceeded we would find immense spiritual riches beyond all telling in these names? Consider at this point, I ask you, dearly beloved, the just man’s virtue, the good God’s love exceeding all limits, and the precision of Sacred Scripture. “Enoch was a hundred and sixty five years old,” the text says, “when he had a son Mathusala. Now, Enoch pleased God,” the text says, “after having Mathusala.”

(12) Let both men and women listen and learn about the just man’s virtue, and not consider marriage to be an obstacle to pleasing God. I mean, it was to this effect that in more than one place Sacred Scripture made a point of saying that he had a son Mathusala and then pleased God, and said the same thing over again in the words, “He pleased God after having Mathusala,” in case anyone thought it was an obstacle to virtue. You see, as long as we are on our guard, neither marriage nor bringing up children nor anything else will be able to stand in the way of our being pleasing to God. I mean, behold how this man, who as it happens had the same nature as ourselves, without the guidance of any law or the instructive contents of Scripture or any other inducement to wisdom gave evidence from his own resources and by choice of such satisfaction in God’s eyes as to live to this day and never experience death even yet. In other words, dearly beloved, had marriage or the raising of children been likely to prove a stumbling block on the way to virtue, the Creator of all would not have introduced marriage into our life lest it prove our undoing in difficult times and through severe problems. Since, however, family life not only offers us no obstacle to

15. Gen 5.21–24. In this selection of texts—Chrysostom obviously feeling the need to push the pace along and omit many details of ages, at the cost of his habitual principle of the value of Scripture’s *akribeia*—his variant of the LXX generally corresponds to the Hebrew, with two interesting exceptions: in v.22 Chrysostom’s text supplies the verb “lived” missing from the Masoretic text and other MSS of LXX (cf. Rahlfs), though he proceeds in his commentary on the verse to draw a moral point based on a reading where the verb does not occur at all nor is even presumed; in v.24 the anthropomorphic “walked with God,” so full of theological significance for commentators like Von Rad (cf. his commentary, 71–73), appears much more lamely in the LXX “pleased God.”

wisdom in God's eyes as long as we are prepared to be on our guard, but even brings us much encouragement and calms the tumult of our natural tendencies, not allowing the billows to surge but constantly ensuring that the bark dock safely in the harbor, consequently he granted the human race the consolation that comes from this source.

(13) In fact, this good man demonstrates that what has been said by us is true. After having Mathusala, the text says, remember, "Enoch pleased God," and it was for no short period that he followed this virtuous way but, as the text tells us, he lasted two hundred years. Since, after the fall of the first formed, a human being was found to ascend the very heights of virtue and to revoke the sin of our first parents through his own acceptable way of life, see the exceeding love of the good God. When he found someone capable of revoking Adam's sin, he showed through his very actions that it was not out of a desire to inflict death on our race for transgression of the command that he had condemned the person who had been given the command; he took him away during his lifetime to another place. "Enoch pleased God," the text says, "and he was not to be found because God had taken him away." Do you see the Lord's wisdom? He took him away during his lifetime, he did not grant him immortality, in case this should diminish fear of sinning; instead, he let it remain strong in the human race.

(14) Hence once again obscurely, so to say, and imperceptibly he wants the sentence he had passed [181] on Adam to be revoked. But he doesn't make it obvious, so that fear may have the effect of bringing people to their senses. Consequently, he took away Enoch, who pleased him. If, however, someone were anxious to be meddlesome and ask, Where did he take him? Has he continued to live till the present? let that person learn not to follow human reasoning or to pry into God's doings but to believe what is said. In other words, whenever God reveals anything, we shouldn't question what is said but rather treat with the highest regard the words spoken by God, even if they do not correspond to the things that lie before us plain to see. I mean, the fact that God took

him away to another place Sacred Scripture has told us, as well as the fact that God took him during his lifetime without his having experienced death; rather, through the personal satisfaction he found in God's eyes he proved superior to the sentence passed on the race of human beings. But where he took him, or what kind of life he lives now, these further details were not given.

(15) Do you see the Lord's goodness, how on finding the man practicing virtue he did not strip him of the dignity which he had accorded the first formed human being before the transgression of the command? He meant to teach us that, if the latter had not paid greater regard to the devil's deceit than to the command given him, he would have been granted the same reward or even greater. "Mathusala was a hundred and eighty seven years old," the text says, "when he had a son Lamech . . ." ¹⁶ Lamech was a hundred and eighty years old when he had a son; he named him Noe, saying, "This child will surely bring us relief from our labors, from the troubles of our hands, and from the curse the Lord placed on the earth." ¹⁷ See once again in the name of Lamech's newborn child the greatness of the mysteries, the extraordinary nature of the prophecy, and the good God's unspeakable love. I mean, when by his own prescience he foresees the future, and describes the increase in human beings' wickedness, he foretells by means of the child's name the evils that will come upon all the race of human beings, in the hope that, provided they respond to fear, come to their senses and eschew wickedness, they may choose virtue instead. See also the Lord's longsuffering, how long before the event he makes his prophecy so as to demonstrate his characteristic love and deprive of any excuse those destined to suffer the punishment.

(16) Perhaps, however, someone may say, How did Lamech

16. Gen 5.25.

17. Gen 5.28-29. Chrysostom, again despite his profound interest in the *akribēia* of the sacred text, selects for comment the verses he finds significant; the ages in his text differ slightly from both the Hebrew and LXX, themselves divergent.

come to have such a degree of prophetic power? After all, Scripture doesn't record that he was a person of virtue and remarkable powers does it? Don't be surprised at that, dearly beloved: the Lord, in his wisdom and inventiveness, frequently permits great and wonderful events to be foretold by unworthy people, not only in the Old Testament but also in the New. I mean, listen to the evangelist's words about Caiaphas, the highpriest of the Jews: "He did not give this as a personal opinion, but in his capacity of highpriest that year he prophesied that Jesus was destined to die, not for the person alone but to bring together into one also the nations that had been scattered."¹⁸ You will find something like it occurring again in the story of Balaam also: when urged to curse the people, he not merely did not curse them but even prophesied great and wonderful things, not merely about the people but also about the coming of the Saviour.¹⁹ So don't be surprised if in this case also Lamech in naming his child gives him a name of this kind; instead, attribute it all to God, who arranges everything in his [182] inventive wisdom.

(17) "He named him Noe"; his name, you see, means relief. So he is referring to that destruction that was due to occur so many years later as relief—as Job also says, "Death means relief for man."²⁰ Since wickedness brings with it great distress of deep intensity, he refers to its removal and disappearance which they were about to experience through that deluge as relief. "He named him Noe," the text says; then it interprets for us the sense of the name by adding, "'Now, this child will bring us relief from our labors'"—meaning he will rid us of evil—"and from the troubles of our hands," meaning again in similar fashion from evil doings, not meaning by this that our hands are troubled but that through their efforts and evil behavior troubles are multiplied. "'And from the curse the Lord placed on the earth'" ; this means he will free us from all the evils encumbering us and from the condition of distress and difficulty affecting the earth by the im-

18. John 11.51–52, with some slight variations from the present state of the text.

19. Cf. Num 23–24.

20. Job 3.23 LXX.

position of the curse on account of the fall of the first formed human being. In other words, understand now, I ask you, dearly beloved, how this child proves to be an occasion of instruction for all who see him as he grows up bit by bit: you had only to learn the child's name for the sense of the name to teach you at once the ruin that would fall on people in a future time. You see, had anyone been inspired to make the simple statement that this would happen, the statement would have been consigned to oblivion and not everyone would have known about this intolerable kind of punishment. In this case, on the contrary, this man grew up in the sight of everyone and became a reminder in season and out²¹ of God's anger.

(18) To learn with precision how long a time it was that the son continued by means of his name to exhort everyone to shun evil, opt for virtue and thus avoid that awful anger, the text says, "Noe was five hundred years old when he had three sons."²² See once more another good man with wife and family achieving great satisfaction in God's eyes and opting for the way of virtue in the sight of everyone, hindered in no way either by marriage or by family responsibilities. All this time, however, we must marvel at God's unspeakable longsuffering and the exceeding ingratitude of people of the time: see, this good man continued all those five hundred years shouting aloud and testifying by his name to the impending approach of the deluge on the whole world on account of the extremity of wickedness as he advised. Nevertheless, despite such warning and despite that great number of years the loving God does not inflict the punishment; instead, with an increase in his own longsuffering he adds still further a considerable number of years to his own peculiar forbearance. You see, he had not created the human race for the specific purpose of punishing them—quite the contrary, to regale them with the enjoyment of countless good things. Hence you see him hesitating at every opportunity and loath to act in this matter of punishment.

(19) Lest, however, we overwhelm your memory with a ple-

21. Cf. 2 Tim 4.2.

22. Gen 5.32.

thora of words, let us close at this point and postpone till next time the remainder. All the same, dearly beloved, let us not listen to these things heedlessly; rather, let us learn to take an interest in virtue, make much of finding satisfaction in God's eyes and not give it second place to management of a house, care of a wife, bringing up [183] children or anything else, thinking that these things suffice to excuse lax and careless living, and putting forward those lifeless and ill-considered words, namely, I am a man of the world, I have a wife, I devote myself to the care of my children. This is what a lot of people are inclined to say when we exhort them to take pains over a virtuous life or show enthusiasm for the reading of Scripture. This is not for me, the person says: I haven't left the world, have I? I haven't become a monk, have I? What are you saying, human being that you are? Are you leaving it to them alone to find satisfaction before God? He wants everyone to be saved and come to the knowledge of truth,²³ and he wishes no one to neglect virtue. Listen, after all, to what he has to say by means of the inspired author: "I desire not the sinner's death as much as his conversion and life."²⁴ No hindrance came to this good man, did it, from intercourse with his wife or family cares?

(20) Accordingly, I beseech you, let us not deceive ourselves, but the more we are embroiled in these cares, so much the more should we take the remedies available in the reading of the Holy Scriptures. I mean, surely the people we've been mentioning were of the same nature as ourselves, and yet had fewer inducements to the practice of virtue. So what excuse could we be granted if while enjoying such great instruction, being favored with so much grace, enjoying assistance from on high, and being in receipt of the promise of those ineffable goods, we did not measure up to the standard of virtue set by those men of old? Were we prepared to remain alert, the matters raised today would suffice to prompt us to love virtue, and never consider anything to be an obstacle to its progress. After all, if people living before the Law arrived at

23. Cf. 1 Tim 2.4.

24. Ezek 18.23.

such heights of virtue on the strength of the instruction innate in their nature, what can we say for ourselves for being found far from virtue despite such assistance, despite the coming of Christ and his countless miracles? Hence, I beseech you, let us not approach the contents of Sacred Scripture idly, but read them with attention so as to gain benefit from them and at least at this late hour be in a position to follow the way of virtue as God would have us do. You see, if we were ready to make this spiritual teaching ring in your ears day in day out, and you were to continue in the same state of indifference, what advantage would come to you from the constant teaching, or what consolation would it be for us to see our effort proving fruitless and no sign of progress stemming from our zeal?

(21) Tell me, after all, are we not composed of two elements—I mean soul and body? So why do we not accord equal attention to both instead of being zealous in treating the body with care, paying money to doctors, ourselves demonstrating much solicitude in its regard, clothing it in rich apparel, supplying it with food beyond what is necessary? We wish it to enjoy constant indulgence and be afflicted with no ailment at all; in the event of some trouble occurring, we apply every means of correcting the problem. This we do in the case of the body—in other words, the lesser element; tell me, after all, what equality is there between soul and body? If, in fact, you want to see the difference, consider how the body comes to be thought of no importance when the soul has left it. Accordingly, you who take such care of the body—for what reason and on what account [184] are you determined to show such disdain for the care of the soul, neither bringing it proper nourishment (I mean the exhortations of the Holy Scriptures), nor applying appropriate remedies to its wounds and the ulcers that sap its strength and undermine its confidence? Instead, you allow it to be overlooked, to waste away with hunger, to be destroyed with ulcers, and to be set upon, so to say, as though by dogs, by those evil and unseemly thoughts, and so to be torn to pieces and lose all its vigor.

(22) Why is it that, as we take care of our body, visible as it

is, we do not take the very same care of our soul, incorporeal and invisible though it is, especially as attention to it is not only easy and trouble-free but also costs us nothing and requires no effort? In the case of attention to the body, on the one hand, there is need of great expense for bodily ailments, paying something to the doctors and the rest for all other assistance (I mean food and clothing), not to mention the majority of people who over and above what is necessary stop at nothing in their spending. In the case of the soul, on the other hand, none of these things is necessary, unless, just as you daily spend money to give nourishment to the body, you are likewise determined not to neglect the soul and let it die of hunger but to provide it with proper nourishment from the reading of Scripture and the support of spiritual advice: "Not on bread alone does man live," Scripture says, remember, "but on every word coming from the mouth of God."²⁵ If so, you would have an excellent attitude to these matters and would be properly mindful of the element more characteristic of us. So, just as you provide a range of garments for the body and give your attention to food for the various seasons and the diversity of clothing, by the same token don't neglect the soul's nakedness and poverty of good works but likewise clothe it in garments becoming it; thus you ought rapidly to improve its condition and restore it to its natural health.

(23) Now, what are its garments? Almsgiving and generosity in regard to the poor—this is the soul's best covering, this its resplendent mantle. But if you want not merely to provide it with clothing but also adorn it as you do the body, provide it also with the assistance of prayer and confession of sins, and do not cease washing its face with a steady flow of tears. You see, just as you bathe the body's face each day with great care lest any smudge marking its face somewhere should give it an ugly aspect, take the trouble to do the same in the case

25. Matt 4.4; cf. Deut 8.3. The LXX, which is being quoted, here and elsewhere renders the Hebrew imperfect by the future where the appropriate English tense would be the present; cf. M. Zerwick, *Biblical Greek* (1960), ET: Rome, 1963.


of the soul also, and bathe it daily by shedding hot tears; by this water it removes the smudge and becomes more resplendent. Because most women through their decadence ignore the instruction of the Apostle when he said, "Don't deck yourselves out in braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or expensive attire,"²⁶ they go to a lot of expense to do just that—and not women only, but also decadent men drag themselves down to the level of those women's luxury and sport rings on their fingers, as well as decking themselves out with large and heavy jewels, which should make them feel ashamed and want to hide. These men and women, therefore, were they prepared to heed my words, would exchange that gold that brings great harm to both men and women for the adornment [185] of the soul instead and by that means beautify it. I mean, just as gold adornments on the body, even if it be a shapely one, render it more ugly, so even if the soul is unsightly, they transform it to the utmost attractiveness when they are worn.

(24) How, you ask, can gold adornments be worn by the soul? Once more by the hands of the poor. You see, the poor take them and thus become the cause of the soul's attractiveness. Pass your gold to them and deliver them into their belly, and they will give you in return such beauty of soul that you will win the true spouse himself by means of your beauty and will gain for yourself countless blessings through him. After all, when you win the favor of the Lord through your loveliness, you have an abundance of all good things and enjoy untold prosperity. If therefore we wish to win the satisfaction of the Lord, let us abandon the effort to beautify the body and give our attention to the soul's beauty day by day so as to win the favor of the loving God and have the good fortune to enjoy those unspeakable rewards, thanks to the grace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, power and honor, now and forever, for all ages of ages. Amen.

26. 1 Tim 2.9.

HOMILY 22

"Noe was five hundred years old when he had three sons, Shem, Cham and Japheth. Human beings began to be numerous on earth, and daughters were born to them."¹

HE [185] LEFTOVERS OF YESTERDAY'S MEAL I would like to put before you today—but don't get upset, dearly beloved, at the mention of leftovers: while in the case of material viands after a day or two they frequently lose their freshness and are useless as nourishment; in the case of a spiritual meal there is no cause for anything like that. On the contrary, no matter how much time elapses, it gives all the more evidence of grace and is found to be fresher and more potent. So come now, let us put into effect the promise we made yesterday, discharge our debt of teaching and give evidence of gratitude. You see, the teaching proves to be of advantage not only to those who receive it, as in the case of debts, but also to me as I discharge my debt. Why do I say, to me as I discharge my debt? The nature of this spiritual debt is such that the more it is discharged, the more it grows and brings about an increase in the remainder as well as untold wealth both for the debtor and for the creditors. Do you recognize the new kind of debt and the unusual form of payment? This is the way, you see, with spiritual things: they increase all the more with distribution, and the remainder grows in direct ratio to the number who share in it; the debtor feels no effect of his payment—instead, what he retains increases while the recipients find themselves also in better circumstances.

(2) So, since this is the nature of these spiritual goods, let us in our turn show all zeal and enthusiasm about payment

1. Gen 5.32; 6.1.

while you ready your ears for receiving it so that with the recesses of your mind set at rest you may receive the words we say, and in this way go off home. You see, I have in mind once again to bring to the fore the subject of Noe, of God's ineffable love and his longsuffering that surpasses all description. You learnt yesterday how right from his birth [186] this just man was given his name by his father and thus went about providing everyone of that period with a warning of their fate, as if he were shouting aloud and saying in his own words, Refrain from evil, turn to virtue, fear the impending punishment—a deluge will engulf the whole world without exception; the excess of God's anger is extreme, since extreme also is the swell of wickedness. He went on doing this not for a year or two or three, but he kept up this exhortation for five hundred years. Do you see the Lord's longsuffering? Do you see the excess of his goodness? Do you see the intensity of wickedness? Do you see the degree of ingratitude?

(3) It was at this point, as you recall, that our instruction yesterday came to a close; so today we must discover how the loving Lord in fidelity to his own goodness did not stop short at five hundred years but demonstrated a further extension of his care for the people who had sinned in that way. "Noe was five hundred years old," the text says. Sacred Scripture gave us an indication of the significance of the good man's age so that we might learn how long a time he lived exhorting them and how they chose the way of evil and were consumed in it, whereas the good man took a path at variance with them all, displayed the highest degree of virtue and so won favor from God and, while all the others became liable to punishment, he escaped it along with his kin. From this we learn that, provided we remain on the alert and do not lose heart, we will not only come to no harm from dealing with evil people but will even be rendered more careful about virtue. You see, the reason why the loving God arranged things in such a way that everyone good and evil should be in the same situation was in order that the wickedness of the evil might be thwarted, the virtue of the good might shine more brightly, and the slothful might gain benefit from association with the

zealous, if they so wished. Consider, after all, I ask you, the height of this man's virtue, how among such a multitude of people rushing into evil he alone took the opposite direction, placing greater value on virtue than on wickedness and not being made uncertain on the way of virtue by the unanimity of others or their great number; instead, he fulfilled in anticipation the statement due to be made by blessed Moses, that "'you will not join many in evil-doing.'"²

(4) The strange and remarkable feature is that despite having so many people—everyone, in fact—urging him to evil-doing and the practice of wickedness, and despite there being no one to encourage him to virtue, of his own accord he attained to such heights with such a degree of fervor as to proceed in a direction contrary to the vast multitude, without fear or regard for their evil concurrence and without entertaining any notions of the kind that the slothful do. When they see a lot of people displaying the same kind of unanimity, they make this a pretext and excuse for their own sloth in the words, Why should I, tell me, take it into my head to venture something out of step with all these people by differing from such a crowd? After all, surely I don't happen to be better than all these people, do I? What would I gain from opposition of that kind? What benefit would their hatred be to me? Noe had no idle ideas like that and gave them no thought; instead, once more he fulfilled in anticipation that statement of the inspired author, "Better one person doing the Lord's will than a lawless host."³ After all (he is saying), surely fellowship with this multitude and associating with it in its headlong career into evil will not suffice to deliver me from punishment? He was aware, you see, he was well aware that each of us will be held responsible for our own salvation, and that it is out of the question for someone else to undergo punishment on the sinner's behalf or to have the good for-

2. Exod 23.2.

3. Sir 16.3. Chrysostom's text of the LXX here corresponds to the expanded version written in the margin of Codex Sinaiticus by a corrector, according to Rahlfs—a matter of significance for those endeavoring to isolate Chrysostom's LXX tradition.

tune [187] to receive a reward. Consequently, just as a spark that happens to be burning in the middle of the sea not only is not extinguished but even gives out its light more brilliantly day by day, so the just man proved to be a teacher to everyone by means of his behavior.

(5) Do you see how the Lord created our nature to enjoy free will? I mean, how did it happen, tell me, that while those people showed enthusiasm for wickedness and rendered themselves liable to punishment, this man opted for virtue, shunned association with them and thus felt no effect of punishment? Is it not crystal clear that each person chose wickedness or virtue of his own volition? You see, if that were not the case and independence did not have its roots in our nature, those people would not have been punished nor the others receive reward for their virtue. Since, however, everything has been allowed to remain with our choice owing to grace from on high, punishment duly awaits the sinners, and reward and recompense those who practice virtue. "Noe was five hundred years old when he had three sons, Shem, Cham and Japheth." Notice the precision of Sacred Scripture: when it detailed to us the good man's age, it revealed the excess of the Lord's longsuffering out of a desire to make clear to us again the extremity of the Lord's tolerance and the strong drive of human beings' wickedness.

(6) Let us, however, listen to the very words coming from Moses: speaking under influence of the Spirit, he intends to teach us everything with precision. "Human beings began to be numerous on earth," the text says, "and daughters were born to them." It was not idly that he added the clause, "and daughters were born to them"; rather, its purpose was that we might get an indication of the great multitude. After all, when the mass of roots is as great as that, it follows there must be a great number of branches growing. "Now, when the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, they took wives for themselves from them all just as they were inclined."⁴ Let us study each expression of this state-

4. Gen 6.2.

ment closely so that nothing of what is hidden below the surface may pass us by. You see, there is need to make a careful study of this passage and confute the fanciful interpretations of those people whose every remark is made rashly—firstly, to repeat what they presume to say, and by demonstrating the absurdity of what is said by them to teach your good selves the true sense of Scripture so that you will not lend your ears idly to people uttering those blasphemies and presuming to speak in a way that brings their own persons into jeopardy. I mean, they claim that this remark is made not about human beings but about angels; these (they say) he called sons of God. Let them demonstrate firstly where angels are called sons of God; they would not, however, be able to show this anywhere. While human beings are called sons of God, angels are nowhere so called. On the contrary, it speaks about angels in these terms: "He makes the winds his angels, fire and flame his ministers,"⁵ whereas about human beings, "I said, You are [188] gods,"⁶ and again, "Sons have I begotten and raised,"⁷ and again, "Israel my firstborn son"⁸—but an angel is nowhere called son, or son of God. What in fact do they claim? To be sure, they really were angels, but because they fell into this lawless way, they lost their status.

(7) Furthermore, another interpretation even more fanciful: Is this not true, then—that they are now fallen, and that this is the cause of their fall? Scripture in fact teaches us differently, that before the creation of the firstformed human being the devil fell from that dignity and with him those whose pretensions outstripped their state, as a sage has also remarked, "Through the devil's envy death entered the world."⁹ I mean, tell me: if he had not fallen before the creation of the human being, how could he have envied the human being while retaining his former status? After all, what sense does it make for an angel to envy a human being, the incorporeal being enjoying such great dignity to envy a creature encumbered with a body? Since, however, he had fallen from heav-

5. Ps 104.4.

7. Isa 1.2.

9. Wis 2.24.

6. Ps 82.6.

8. Exod 4.22.

enly glory into utter disrepute, and though incorporeal himself he saw the newly created human being enjoying such great esteem despite its bodily condition through the love of the Creator, his burning rage led him into envy, and by means of the deceit he practiced through the serpent he caused the human being to be liable to punishment of death. This, you see, is what wickedness is like; it cannot take kindly to the prosperity of others. So it is plain for all to see that in times past the devil and all his company fell from that condition of glory and were numbered among the disreputable. Is it not a particular hallmark of folly to claim that angels descended to have intercourse with women, and that incorporeal nature of theirs was reduced to association with corporeal creatures? Or do you not hear the words of Christ about the being of angels, "At the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God"?¹⁰ After all, it is not for that kind of incorporeal creature to ever feel the onset of desire. In response to these people we have to reach the same conclusion, that to admit this notion into one's mind is the height of absurdity. I mean, if the saints and people granted the gift of the Holy Spirit were unable to have a vision of angels (the man of passion, after all, caught sight of an angel's presence, not his being—how could he see an incorporeal being?—but rather underwent a transformation and came close to losing his life in the process, this man of such calibre and such eminence almost falling unconscious on the ground),¹¹ who could be so utterly deranged as to admit this blasphemous remark and the folly it betokens, that this incorporeal and intellectual creature could tolerate intercourse with bodily things?

(8) Lest, however, in raising these matters we ourselves largely seem to be wasting time to no purpose—come now, since we have convinced your good selves through these proofs how this objection has been proved groundless—let us

10. Matt 22.30 in one MS tradition.

11. Chrysostom is here referring to Dan 10 in the Greek version of Theodotion, which differs from the LXX in details such as the mention of Daniel as "man of passion."

teach you the truth of the material by reading again the words of Sacred Scripture. "Human beings began to be numerous on the earth," the text reads, "and [189] daughters were born to them. Now, when the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, they took wives for themselves from them all just as they were inclined." We made the point before in teaching you that it is customary with Scripture to call human beings sons of God. So since these people took their origin from Seth and from his son named Enosh (the text, remember, saying, "He it was who hoped to invoke the name of the Lord God"¹²), those descended from him in future were called sons of God by Sacred Scripture for the reason of their imitation of the virtue of their ancestors up to his time. On the other hand, he gave the name sons of men to those born after Seth, the descendants of Cain and those taking their descent from him. "Human beings began to be numerous on the earth," the text says, "and daughters were born to them. Now, when the sons of God" (the descendants of Seth and Enosh) "saw that the daughters of men" (those born to the other, whom he described by saying that "daughters were born to them") "were beautiful." See how through this expression he indicates to us all their licentiousness; it was not through a desire to raise families that they set about this behavior but out of sheer lechery—"Now, when they saw that the daughters of men were beautiful," the text says. Lust for a shapely figure brought them to this ruin, and a pretty face proved to be for them an occasion of debauchery and licentiousness.

(9) Nor was this enough: the text adds, "They took wives for themselves from them all just as they were inclined." This likewise has the effect of conveying their great licentiousness in the fact that they were ensnared by beauty and had no intention of curbing their unbridled desire; instead, they were captivated and intoxicated by the sight of it, and through their illicit behavior they left themselves bereft of heavenly favor. So that we may learn that they behaved this way neither

12. Gen 4:26.

by the dictates of marriage nor for the sake of raising a family, the text accordingly goes on, "When they saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, they took wives for themselves from them all just as they were inclined." Why was this so? Would anyone lay the blame on the sight of the eyes? Not at all: it wasn't the eye that was the cause of the lapse but the carelessness of choice and the free rein of desire. You see, the purpose for which the eye was created was that through it one should descry God's creatures and praise their Maker. So it is the role of the eye to see, though malicious sight is due to reason, which directs from within. After all, the Lord created the limbs to be of use for us in doing good, and he allowed them to be directed by the spiritual being—I mean the soul. So whenever it inclines to negligence and loosens the reins, like a rider who, unequal to the task of checking the wild impulses of his mounts, gives them the bit and lets himself fall under the hooves of the horses pulling the chariot, our will in just the same manner surrenders itself to wild desires and surrenders itself whenever it is incapable of employing its faculties properly. Hence, when Christ our Lord saw the unreliability of our nature and the indifference of our will, he made a law to protect and curb our inquisitive sight so as to quench the blaze that springs up within us even at a great distance, saying as he did, [190] "The man who has looked at a woman so as to lust after her has already committed sin with her in his heart."¹³ Consequently, he is saying, I am forbidding your sight to be unrestricted so that I may preserve you from improper behavior. Do not think, after all, he is saying, that association alone causes sin: it is the intention that brings our condemnation.

(10) So the people in our narrative saw the beauty and were captivated by what they saw. "They saw that they were beautiful," the text says, remember, "and took wives for themselves from them all just as they were inclined." But despite this improper behavior and unrestrained attitude, let us see God's goodness. "The Lord God said, 'My spirit is not to remain

13. Matt 5.28.

forever with these human beings on account of their being carnal. Instead, they will have a life of one hundred and twenty years.'"¹⁴ Such depths of love can be seen in these few words: "The Lord God said," the text reads, "'My spirit is not to remain with these human beings on account of their being carnal.'" He called his exercise of providence his spirit in this verse where he foretells their destruction. So that you may learn that the remark was made to that effect, notice what is added: "'on account of their being carnal'"—that is to say, on account of their devoting themselves to carnal pursuits and not employing properly the properties of the soul, but passing their life just as if they were clad in flesh alone and deprived of soul. You see, it is the unfailing practice of Sacred Scripture to call carnal people flesh, as also to describe people of virtue non-carnal, in the way Paul says, "You, however, are not in the flesh"¹⁵—not because you are not clad in flesh but because despite being clad in flesh you rise above the thinking of the flesh. So, just as Scripture said to some, for reason of their scorning the concerns of the flesh, "You, however, are not in the flesh," so in the case of others, since they were constantly caught up in carnal concerns, it called them carnal. "On account of their being carnal," I will not continue to allow them to be defiled by sin.

(11) Do you see the depth of his anger? Do you see the extent of the punishment he threatens? Consider how he mingled love with his anger and his threats. You see, this is what our Lord is like: he often threatens, not so as to put his threat into effect but that he may bring us round and never have to put his threat into operation. I mean, if he intended to punish us, why would he announce it beforehand? Since, however, this is not his intention, consequently he is forever delaying and postponing, and he announces it beforehand to give the guilty the opportunity to shun evil, choose virtue, and avoid experiencing punishment. So when he threatened to deliver them to complete disaster (this, after all, is the sense of "My spirit is not to remain with these human beings on account

14. Gen 6.3.

15. Rom 8.9.

of their being carnal”—as if to say, “‘I won’t allow them to live any longer’”), he was not content with putting up with them for five hundred years, the whole lifetime of Noe, when they were instructed by the sound of his name. So he further withholds his anger at this point and sets another deadline for them in the words, I threatened, I spoke up, and I made clear my anger which must be let loose on you for all the sins you have committed; but because I intend to save even those who have committed irreversible wrong and want no one to be lost, accordingly I grant you a further period of a hundred and twenty years so that, provided you are prepared to expunge your sins [191] by conversion to a better way of life and option for virtue, you may avoid experiencing punishment. The text says, remember, “‘They will have a life of a hundred and twenty years.’”

(12) The text goes on, “Now, the giants were on the earth in those days. Later, when the sons of God mated with the daughters of men, and children were born to them, these were the giants of old, people of renown.”¹⁶ By “giants” in this verse I think Sacred Scripture is referring to men of great physical stature. From these people, the text says, their lines developed. Elsewhere, too, you see, you can find this stated: “Giants come to check my anger,”¹⁷ Scripture says. Some people think that this number of a hundred and twenty years is the limit placed on their life; but this is not the point he is making—rather, his intention is to stress his longsuffering up to this point, which he has displayed in their regard even despite such terrible sins. So let us learn that, in spite of his anger, his threatening and his longsuffering shown them over such a long period of time with a view to their repentance, they not only profited nothing but even persisted in the same ways—hence the words, “When the sons of God mated with the daughters of men, and children were born to them, these were the giants of old, people of renown.” Do you see the excess of their ingratitude? Do you see their un-

16. Gen 6.4.

17. Isa 13.3 in a variant of the LXX's preferred reading, “to execute my anger.”

responsive spirit? Neither fear of punishment nor the extent of God's longsuffering won them away from their evil behavior; instead, once they had plunged into the abyss and had been blinded in their mind's eye, they no longer had the will to be rescued, immersed as they were in evil desire as if in some intoxication—just as some sage has said, "When the godless fall to the depths of evil, they lose all sense of respect."¹⁸ It is a terrible thing, you see, dearly beloved, a terrible thing to fall into the clutches of the devil. I mean, the soul then, as though caught in a net, and like a boar trapped in the mire, is likewise caught up in pleasure and, swept along by its evil habits, it loses all sense of the foul odor of its sins. Consequently, we must be awake and on our guard so as never to allow the evil demon any entrance at the outset, lest he cloud our reasoning, blind the sharp vision of our mind, and thus as if robbing us of sunlight render us unable to see the rays of the Sun of Justice and cause us to fall into the abyss—something that befell those people at that time.

(13) After all, give ear once more to the patience of God's goodness: "Now, the Lord God saw," the text goes on, "that the vices of human beings were multiplied on earth."¹⁹ What is meant by the expression, "Now, he saw"? Had the Lord been unaware? Not at all; rather, Sacred Scripture explains everything with our limitations in mind, and so as to teach us that even despite his extraordinary longsuffering they persisted in the same ways or even involved themselves in worse evils, it says, "Now, he saw that the vices of human beings were multiplied." You see, from this evil behavior, as from some spring, arose as well many other sins in them—hence it says, "the vices of human beings." I mean, where there is impurity and licentiousness and such intemperance, it is likely also that intoxication, drunken violence, extreme dishonesty, greed and countless other evils will arise. "Now, the Lord God saw," the text says, "that human beings' vices were multiplied on the earth, and everyone gave himself up wholly to pon-

18. Prov 18.3 in a variant of the LXX.

19. Gen 6.5.

dering evil all day long." [192] See how each of the expressions reveals the magnitude of the sins. I mean, after making the sweeping statement, "Human beings' vices were multiplied on earth," it added, "Everyone." There is great significance in that word. It is not only the young, the text says, but also the elderly who practice the same vices as the young; not only man but also woman; not only slave but also free; not only rich but also poor.

(14) The word "pondered" also has great force: they were not coerced into this without warning, but gave themselves up to pondering it and made it their intention hour after hour, devoting themselves to evil eagerly, not just tripped up by sin accidentally and by chance once or twice but assiduously involving themselves in it and making a practice of evil—that is to say, it was done by them with great enthusiasm, not casually or carelessly; not for a short time, but day in day out they devoted the whole of their lives to it. Do you see the intensity of the evil? Do you see how they made the affair the object of their care, committing every evil assiduously, and how people of every age gave themselves to the practice of evil? "Everyone," it says—not some callow youth, or naive wretch, but everyone of them immediately and right from the outset took to this wicked contest, all striving to surpass their neighbor in the criminality of their behavior. I mean, consider here, I ask you, the good man's extraordinary wisdom in being able to avoid being harmed amidst such a consonance of evil and to feel no injurious effect from it all. Instead, as though being possessed of a different nature, he adopted that kind of resolute attitude: of his own account he zealously undertook the practice of virtue, shunned their common acquiescence in evil, and remained proof against the ruinous fate descending on them all.

(15) "The Lord God reconsidered," the text goes on, "what he had done in creating the human being on the earth."²⁰ Notice again the considerateness evident in the concreteness of the expression. "He reconsidered," the text says, instead

20. Gen 6.6.

of, "He regretted." Not that God regrets—perish the thought; rather, Sacred Scripture recounts it to us in human fashion so as to teach us that the excess of their sins aroused the loving God to such anger.²¹ "The Lord God reconsidered," the text says, "what he had done in creating the human being on the earth"—in other words, Surely by doing this I have not been responsible for making him fall into such disaster and become guilty of his own ruin? By doing this I placed him in a position of such dignity right from the very outset and showed such concern for him so that he might choose virtue and be saved from ruin. But since he did not cooperate with my loving kindness, it then proved better to put an end to his evil designs.

(16) "The Lord God thought about it and said, 'I will wipe off the face of the earth the human being I have made, everything from human being to cattle, everything from reptiles to birds of heaven, because I have reconsidered what I have done in creating them.'"²² All that lay within my power, he is saying, I have given evidence of: I have brought creatures from non-being to being, I have implanted in their nature the knowledge of what is to be done and not to be done, I have blessed them with free will, I have invoked longsuffering beyond all telling, and after that long period of time, my anger and the threats I have made, I also set another deadline in my desire to bring them [193] to a sense of their failings and to revoke my anger. But since they gained no benefit from all this, it was necessary to put threats into effect, to achieve their utter ruin, and to blot out their race like some

21. Anthropomorphisms posed a particular challenge to Chrysostom and his school in their efforts to maintain that balance between divine transcendence and the human character of the Scriptures, the latter representing God's gracious *synkatabasis*, "considerateness" (of our limitations, as Chrysostom mentioned above in commenting on Gen 6.5). In this case it is the *pachutēs*, the concreteness of the language employed in anthropomorphic expressions, that demonstrates that considerateness without undermining the correlative of God's transcendence. See my article, "*sunkatabasis*."

22. Gen 6.7. Again, as in the previous verse, the LXX seems reluctant to admit openly true regret on God's part, preferring the idea of his having second thoughts. But cf. James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford, 1961), pp. 252–53.

pernicious leaven lest they become lessons in evil to succeeding generations. "The Lord God said, 'I will wipe off the face of the earth the human being I have made, everything from human being to cattle.'"

(17) Perhaps, however, someone may say, Why is it that in the case of the human being's decline into evil the wild animals too endure the same punishment? For good reason. I mean, surely the wild animals were not created to serve their own needs? Everything was brought into existence for human beings, so once they were removed from the circle, what need would there be of the animals? Hence they also share the punishment so that you may learn the degree of God's anger. Just as in the beginning when the firstformed person sinned the earth received the curse, so too in this case when the human being was on the point of being blotted out the wild animals also share the punishment. Just as, on the other hand, when the human being is pleasing to God, creation also shares the human being's prosperity (as Paul also says, "Creation too will be set free from its servitude to decay with a view to the freedom of the children of God's glory"²³), so too in this case when the human being is about to be punished on account of the great number of sins and to be consigned to destruction, the cattle also and the reptiles and birds are likewise caught up in the deluge that is due to overcome the whole world. Just as in a household, when the chief steward incurs the wrath of the master, it is likely that all the servants also share in his shame, in just the same way in this case too as with the house, when people fell by the wayside everything in the house and everything lying under the master's control necessarily incurs the same punishment.

(18) "'I have reconsidered,'" the text says, "'what I have done in creating them.'" What great considerateness this remark is filled with! Surely I did not intend, he is saying, to inflict on them such awful punishment? They themselves through the excess of their criminal behavior drove me to this great anger. Then, lest we think that the complete annihila-

23. Rom 8.21 with a slight variation in word order.

tion of humankind is happening and that our race is being eradicated, instead of our learning the great evil that sin is and the great good that virtue is, and that one person doing the Lord's will is better than a thousand lawless people, the text proceeds, "Noe, on the contrary, found favor in the sight of the Lord God."²⁴ Even if the whole multitude, the text is saying, fell into such terrible wickedness, still at the same time this good man kept alive the spark of virtue, speaking to them all during the whole of this period, exhorting them to give up evil, and keeping himself free of harm from them. Just as they through their behavior drove the loving God to anger, so he too by choosing virtue "found favor in the sight of the Lord God." "God (you remember) is no respecter of persons;"²⁵ rather, if he finds even one person in such a multitude doing what pleases him, far from scorning him he regales him with his particular providence and shows the greater care for him the more closely he has chosen the way of virtue at a time when there are others who are bent on evil.

(19) Understanding [194] this, then, let our eyes be on one thing alone—pleasing him and bringing ourselves to win grace from on high. Let us not be so beholden to friendship or so enslaved to habit that we neglect virtue; instead, let us take advantage of God's longsuffering as we ought, and while we still have time let us put aside all indifference, yearn after virtue and hate evil. You see, unless we devote ourselves to virtue with longing and enthusiasm and direct extreme hatred towards evil, we will be unable to shun the harm that comes from the latter and gain a hold upon the former. For proof that virtue is of advantage to those that long for it and burn with the desire for it, listen to the inspired author's words: "The judgements of the Lord are true, utterly righteous, and to be desired beyond gold and much precious metal,"²⁶ not because these things are not so desirable but because with us you can find nothing else more sought after than these sub-

24. Gen 6.8.

25. Acts 10.34.

26. Ps 19.9-10.

stances. Hence he went on to say, "And sweeter than honey and the honeycomb;" in this case also he did not use the comparison for the reason that it is possible to find something sweeter than honey. So, just as in amassing riches people lose their senses out of lust and frenzy, become excited in devoting all their energies to this enterprise, and never have their fill—avarice, after all, being an insatiable addiction, and just as with alcoholics the more wine they take into their system the greater the thirst they burn with—so too the avaricious are unable to check this irrepressible folly, but rather the more they see their wealth increasing, the more they enkindle their appetite, and do not rest from this evil desire until they have fallen to the very depths of wickedness.

(20) Consequently, if these people display to such an intense degree this mischievous enthusiasm, which has proved to be responsible for all those evils, much more should we constantly keep fresh in our mind the judgements of the Lord, more desirable as they happen to be than gold and much precious metal, and consider nothing preferable to virtue; rather, we should excise from our soul these ruinous passions and realize that the fleeting pleasure of this kind is likely to engender everlasting distress and torture without end, and not deceive ourselves nor think that our fortunes begin and end with this present life. You see, even if many people don't admit this in so many words, but claim to believe in the doctrine of the resurrection and future retribution, nevertheless I take notice not of their words but of what they do day by day. That is to say, if you are looking forward to resurrection and retribution, why go chasing the values of this life to such an extent? Why, tell me, do you put yourself to such trouble day in day out amassing more possessions than there is sand on the seashore, not to mention property and dwellings, as well as buying baths, often acquiring these things through robbery and greed, and thus fulfilling that saying from the inspired author, "Woe to those who add house to house, and join field to field so as to steal a march on their neighbor"?²⁷ Cannot this sort of thing be seen hap-

27. Isa 5.8, where the LXX differs from our Hebrew text.

pening day after day? One person says, That house casts a terrible shadow on mine, and he invents countless pretexts to get hold of it, while another lays hold of a poor person's property and makes it his own. And what in fact is worse, remarkable and unheard of, and quite beyond excuse, is for a person comfortably situated in one locality being able to move elsewhere without any good reason for wanting to, either [195] on account of a change of circumstances or because constrained by physical disability; all over the place, in city after city, he is bent on procuring monuments to his own avarice and having timeless effigies of his own evil for all to see. He heaps all sins of this kind on his own head without feeling his heavy and troublesome burden, whereas enjoyment of them he leaves for others, not only after his departure from this life but even here before his demise. You see, no matter what he wishes, he is stripped of his possessions, they are all squandered, so to say, by his friends and left in tatters without the smallest part of them falling to him to enjoy. Yet why do I say enjoy? Even if he wanted, how could he with one stomach manage to dispose of such an abundance of good things?

(21) The cause of all evils, however, is vainglory and the desire to give one's own name to property, baths, houses. What good is it to you, human being that you are, when in no time a fever comes upon you, your soul suddenly takes wings and leaves you alone and naked—or, rather, stripped of virtue but encumbered with injustices, robberies, acts of greed, groanings, lamentation, orphans' tears, plots, intrigues? How could you, carrying those heavy burdens of sins weighing upon you, be able to pass through that narrow gate, which could not admit a load of that size? You would therefore have to remain outside, and lumbered with these burdens to repent all too late, already contemplating before your eyes the punishments prepared for you, that terrible fire that is never extinguished and the worm that does not die.²⁸ If, on the other hand, we have any sense of our own salvation, let us, while we still have time, abandon evil ways, concern our-

28. Cf. Mark 9.48; Isa 66.24.

selves with virtue and despise vainglory. This, you see, is the reason why it is called vain, because it is quite empty and has no substance or stable foundation: it proves only to be a deceiver of the eyes before it disappears and flies away. Or do we not often see the case of a person who today is escorted by attendants and surrounded by bodyguards, whereas tomorrow he is incarcerated and lodged with brigands? What is more deceptive than this vain and empty glory? Even if in this present life the change in circumstances does not affect the person, death will come upon him to abolish his property completely, the person today swaggering in the public eye, who confines people to prison, the person seated on the throne with great ideas of his own importance, regarding all people as dust under his feet—in a trice he is next found stretched out a lifeless corpse, giving off a stench, the butt of countless insults from those he had wronged and those he had not wronged out of sympathy with their wrong. What could be more pitiable than such a person? While all his possessions are often divided up amongst his enemies and foes, the sins accruing to him from them he carries with him and an account of them is scrupulously required of him.

(22) So, I beseech you, let us shun this vainglory and long for the glory that is true and enduring. Let love of possessions not prove our undoing, nor the flame of passion [196] scorch us, nor hatred and envy consume us, nor rage reduce us to ashes. Instead, let us quench all these evil and ruinous passions in the dew of the Spirit, scorn the things of this life and long for future goods; let us set our thoughts on the future and give close attention to our lifestyle. After all, this was not the purpose of our being brought into this life, that we should only eat and drink. Living is not for eating and drinking, but eating and drinking for living. So let us not reverse the order, nor become slaves of the belly as though created for it nor slaves of the pleasures of the flesh; instead, let us consider the harm coming to us from that source, quell the movements of the flesh and not fall victims of sloth nor allow the flesh to rise up against the spirit. If Paul—a man of such calibre and stature, who traversed the whole world like

a winged creature, who proved superior to bodily necessities and was privileged to hear those secret words that no one else to this day has heard—if he wrote these words, “I punish my body and bring it into subjection lest while preaching to others I myself become reprobate;”²⁹ if then that man, the object of so great favor, despite such conspicuous prowess felt the need to punish his body, bring it into subjection, submit it to the authority of the soul and place its impulses under the virtue of the soul (people, after all, punish what is rebellious, and bring into subjection what is froward), what then would we say, deprived as we are of these goods, lumbered as we are with the burden of sins, and with nothing to show in addition to this beyond deep indifference?

(23) After all, this war admits of no truce, does it? It has no set time for the assault, does it? At all times there is need for watching and waiting and never being over-confident, since no time has been set for the assault by the one who is waging war and hostilities against us. Let us therefore have our wits about us to stay out of trouble, avoid the snares of the enemy and win God’s loving kindness, thanks to the grace and mercy of his only-begotten Son, to whom with the Father and the Spirit be glory, power and honor, now and forever, for ages of ages. Amen.

29. 1 Cor 9.27.

HOMILY 23

*"Noe, on the contrary, found favor in the sight of the Lord God. Now, these are the generations of Noe. Noe was a just man; he was faultless by
• comparison with his contemporaries. Noe pleased God."¹*



DO [196] YOU SEE in what has been said already the extent of God's loving kindness and the surpassing degree of his longsuffering? Do you see the extremity of the wickedness of the human beings of that time? Have you learnt in the midst of this kind of populace how much virtue the good man had, and that he was quite unaffected either by their universal decline into wickedness or the fact that he alone stood out from the crowd of them and traveled in the opposite direction? In other words, he was like a skillful pilot, controlling the rudder of his mind with great vigilance, not allowing the craft to be submerged under the violence of the billows of wickedness, but getting the better of the storm and riding it out at sea as though safely berthed in port; in this fashion [197] by steering the tiller of virtue he kept himself clear of the deluge that was about to engulf everyone in the world. This is the kind of thing virtue is: immortal, unbowed, proof against the vagaries of this present life, soaring above the snares of wickedness as though from some lofty mountain peak and despising all human interests, it is thus unaffected by any of the material realities that prove harmful to other people. Like a person stationed on some high rock mocking the waves as he sees them crashing against the rock and being immediately dissolved into spray, so too the person who practices virtue is placed in a safe position and suffers no unsettling effect from the confusion of worldly

1. Gen 6.8–9, with the LXX apparently endeavoring to soften the anthropomorphism in the first Hebrew verb.

affairs, but rather remains firm in serenity of mind, revelling in the tranquility of his own thoughts and aware that the affairs of this life ebb and flow with such rapidity that they differ in no way from the tides in a river. You see, just as you can notice the waves of the sea whipped up at one moment to an incredible height and suddenly brought low again, well in just the same way let us observe people who shun virtue and are mixed up in evil enjoying at one moment lofty notions, adopting a superior pose and being wrapt in the affairs of this life, then suddenly brought low and reduced to utter indigence.

(2) These in fact are the people blessed David, the inspired author, was referring to in the words, "Don't worry when a person becomes wealthy or when the splendor of his house increases, because at his death he will take none of it with him."² He is right in saying, "Don't worry." Don't let yourself be upset, he is saying, by the affluence of the rich and the glamor of appearances. After all, before long you will see them laid low, inert, corpses, thrown out to become the food of worms, stripped naked of all their possessions, quite unable to take anything of theirs with them, and instead leaving it all here. So don't get upset to see the events of the moment, nor commend the good luck of the person who shortly is due to be rid of these things. This, you see, is what present affluence is like, and this the true nature of wealth: it doesn't accompany those who pass on from here—instead, they leave it all here behind them, naked and destitute of everything, clad only in their wickedness and the burden of sins they have amassed. In the case of virtue, on the contrary, things are quite different: even here it puts us beyond the reach of those plotting our downfall, makes us invincible, bestows upon us endless enjoyment, does not allow us to be affected by changing circumstances, and when we pass on from here it becomes

2. Ps 49.16–17a; it is significant that Chrysostom impairs the parallelism by omitting 17b, which employs the verb *synkatabainein* in the sense of "going down into the grave," which would not correspond with the usual sense of his favorite notion of *synkatabasis* for the Scriptures, God's loving consideration (cf. Introduction (20) in FOTC 74).

our traveling companion, especially at that moment when we need its assistance, and on that dread day it renders us great help, softening the gaze of the Judge; as in this life it makes us superior to the direst of fates, so too in the future it snatches from those dreadful punishments those who have virtue to show for themselves. Nor is this all: it even proves to be responsible for our enjoying ineffable blessings.

(3) To prove to you that this is the case and that we are not telling you idle tales and spinning yarns, we shall now endeavor to give a demonstration to your good selves from what has already been proposed. I mean, see how this remarkable person—I mean Noe—at the time the whole human race was provoking the loving Lord to anger against them, was able through his own virtue to avoid feeling the effects of this anger and to win great favor from the Lord. Let us at this point, if you don't mind, discuss the situation of this present [198] life. What I mean is, perhaps some people place no credence in things of the future that cannot be seen with the naked eye. So let us see from the things that happened in this case what befell those that pursued wickedness, on the one hand, and what reward was granted the man who had opted for virtue, on the other. Remember, when owing to the extremity of wickedness the good God condemned the human race to annihilation in the words, “I will wipe off the face of the earth the human being I have made,”³ showing the extraordinary degree of his anger, he delivered the sentence not only against the human race but also against the cattle, the reptiles and the birds. You see, since human beings, for whom these creatures had been created, were due to perish and to disappear from sight, it was appropriate that they, too, should be affected by the punishment with them. Since, therefore, the sentence was unqualified and made no distinctions, you should learn that God is no respecter of persons and that nothing entering our hearts escapes his notice; should he find even a slight excuse put up on our behalf, he shows his ineffable love (Scripture says) that we may not think

3. Gen 6.7.

the destruction of the human race was complete, but may realize that in his characteristic goodness he allows a spark to be saved and a root for the human race, so that once again it should grow up into mighty boughs. "Noe, on the contrary," the text says, "found favor in the sight of God."⁴

(4) Notice the precision of Scripture, how you can't find even a chance syllable contained there to no purpose. After it taught us the excess of human beings' wickedness and the magnitude of the punishment due to be inflicted on its practitioners, it teaches us also about the good man who was able to keep virtue unimpaired amidst such a vast multitude. Virtue, after all, is remarkable even by itself; but when someone proves capable of practicing it in the company of its adversaries, he gives evidence of a much more remarkable degree of virtue. Hence, as though in admiration of the just man, Sacred Scripture says that, in the midst of so many people due to experience God's anger for their wickedness, "Noe, on the contrary, found favor in the sight of the Lord God." "Found favor," to be sure, but "in the sight of God." Not simply "found favor," but "in the sight of the Lord God," so as to teach us that he had this single aim, to be commended by that unsleeping eye and to set no store by men's praise nor their scorn or mockery. You see, it was natural that the person who was bent on practicing virtue in opposition to everybody else would have to incur mockery and scorn, since all those who practice evil are ever accustomed to ridicule those who insist on avoiding it and choosing virtue—something that happens now, too.

(5) Let us have an eye to those many listless people who cannot bear mockery and scorn, but prefer the praise of human beings to true and everlasting glory, ensnared as they are and dragged down by the evil of other people. It is, you see, characteristic of a noble spirit that relies on firm resolve to have the ability to withstand those people anxious to disparage it, and to make no concessions to appeasement of such people; instead, it is accustomed to keep its gaze fixed on that

4. Gen 6.8.

unsleeping eye, to be subject to its approval alone and ignore others', and to consider worthless their praise or censure and rather pass it by like so many shadows and dreams. In the present case the vast majority were generally unable to withstand the scorn of ten, or twenty, or even fewer people, and so were tripped up and came to grief. "There is, you see, a sense of shame that brings on sin."⁵ It is, after all, no slight thing to scorn those who mock and ridicule and are bent on making fun of you. Our hero, [199] however, was made of sterner stuff than this: he scorned not only ten, or twenty, or a hundred people but even the whole of the human race, countless numbers of them. Naturally, you see, they all mocked and ridiculed him, treated him like an idiot and abused him in their drunken violence, and perhaps would have even liked to tear him limb from limb, if that were possible. Malice, after all, always goes to wild extremes in its treatment of virtue; not only, however, does it deal it no injury but it even succeeds in making it stronger to resist. Such, you see, is the strength of virtue that in endurance it gets the better of its persecutors and in opposition it proves superior to its opponents.

(6) You can see this, of course, in many situations; still, so that we may offer you some examples—Scripture says, remember, "Give wise people an opportunity, and they will become wiser"⁶—we ought adduce for you examples from both the Old and the New Testaments. I ask you, accordingly, consider Abel: was he not done away with by Cain? Was he not laid low? But don't concentrate on the fact that the killer prevailed and won the day, that he did away with the object of his envy though he had done him no wrong. Instead, think of the sequel, that the victim is on everybody's lips from that day to this, a paradigm for all, his memory undimmed by the passage of all that time, whereas the killer, the victor, even during his lifetime had to endure an existence worse than death, and from that day to this his notoriety has never waned and on the part of everyone he has been the object of condemnation, while his victim day in day out is the recipient

5. Sir 4.21.

6. Prov 9.9.

of words of praise from everyone. And while this is true of the present life, what words or what thoughts can do justice to their fate in the world to come? I know, of course, that with your brains you will find many other such contrasts contained in the Scriptures. This, after all, was the reason they were composed for our benefit, that we should learn these things and so shun evil and prefer virtue. Would you like to discern the same process occurring in the New Testament as well? Listen to blessed Luke describing exactly the same thing in regard to the apostles, that after being scourged they went out from the council rejoicing that they had been judged worthy of being abused for the name of Christ.⁷ Of course, the scourging was no cause of satisfaction, to be sure—rather of pain and distress; but scourging for the sake of God and the grounds on which they were scourged gave rise to satisfaction in them. Their torturers, of course, were utterly at a loss to know what was happening: listen to their consternation after the scourging as they ask, “‘What are we to do to these people?’”⁸ What are you saying? You have scourged them, inflicted countless tortures on them, and yet you are still at a loss? Such a powerful and invincible thing is virtue, proving superior even in the course of suffering such torments.

(7) Lest, however, we make the sermon too lengthy, we must come back again to this good man and be amazed at the extraordinary degree of his virtue, how he had the fortitude to ignore this huge multitude’s mockery, ridicule, scorn and sarcasm (I keep mentioning this, as you can see, and will never give up mentioning it), and to prove superior to it. How did he manage? I’ll tell you: because he had constant regard for the unsleeping eye, he kept his mind’s gaze fixed in that direction, and in future paid heed to all other things as though they didn’t exist. That is the way things are, you see: when one is smitten with that love, and directs one’s whole person to the search for God, one takes no notice of visible realities; instead, one has constantly before one’s mind the object of

7. Acts 5.41.

8. Acts 4.16. Is Chrysostom deliberately reversing the order of these two situations in Acts to make a better moral point?

one's love, by night and by day, going to rest and getting up. So don't be surprised if this [200] just man, once he gave that direction to his thinking, took no notice of the people endeavoring to bring him down: giving evidence of his own resources and winning favor from on high, he proved superior to them all. "Noe," the text says, remember, "found favor in the sight of the Lord God." Even though he was not the favorite or darling of any of the human race of the time through his refusal to follow the same route as theirs, nevertheless he found favor in the eyes of the one who haunts the heart, and to him his attitude was acceptable. What harm, after all, tell me, ensued in this case from the mockery and ridicule of his peers, considering the fact that the one who shapes our hearts and understands all our actions proclaimed the man's deeds and rewarded him? On the other hand, what benefit would it be to a human being were he the object of the admiration and praise of the whole world while being condemned on that dread day by the Creator of all and the Judge who is proof against all deceit? Understanding this, therefore, dearly beloved, let us set no store by people's commendation nor seek praise from them in every way; instead, with him alone in mind who examines heart and entrails, let us practice the works of virtue and shun evil.

(8) For this reason, you see, Christ also taught us not to sigh after the praises of human beings and, following many other warnings, he finally brought this charge against us as well: "Woe to you when all people speak well of you."⁹ Notice how by the word "woe" he revealed to us the extent of the punishment awaiting such people. This word "woe," after all, is an exclamation of lament, so that it is as if he is lamenting their fate when he says, "Woe to you when all people speak well of you." Notice, too, the precision in the expression: he didn't simply say "people" but "all people." You see, it is not possible for a virtuous person who travels by the straight and narrow path and follows Christ's commands to enjoy the praise and admiration of all people—so strong is the impulse

9. Luke 6.26.

of evil and the resistance to virtue. Consequently, as the Lord knows that it would be impossible for the person who practices virtue assiduously and accepts praise only from him to be commended by all people and to enjoy good repute with them, for this reason he laments the fate of those who neglect virtue for the sake of such people. You see, commendation from them would be the clearest indication of not setting great store by virtue. How, after all, would the virtuous person be commended by everyone if he insisted on rescuing the wronged from their wrongdoers, the oppressed from their oppressors? Again, if he were to correct the wayward and praise the righteous, would it not be likely that while the latter praised him, the former would revile him? Hence Christ says, "Woe to you when all people speak well of you." How then is it not proper to feel admiration and amazement at this good man for the reason that what Christ taught at his coming this man prior to him was well versed in by the law innate in his make-up and put into practice to an extraordinary degree, and rejecting men's praise he devoted himself to finding favor with God through the virtue of daily life? The text says, remember, "Noe found favor in the sight of the Lord God."

(9) While, however, this remarkable author told us under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that Noe found favor in the sight of the Lord God on account of the virtue that distinguished him, we need also study the following words and see the verdict given him by God. "Now, these are the generations of Noe," the text says. "Noe was a righteous man; he was faultless by comparison with his contemporaries. Noe pleased God." An unusual style of genealogy; Sacred Scripture [201], in saying, "Now, these are the generations of Noe," and setting our ears tingling as if on the point of recounting his genealogy—who his father was, whence he took his lineage, how he came to be in this life and all other details that people normally give in tracing genealogies—all such it abandoned, and proving to be superior to custom it says, "Noe was a just man; he was faultless by comparison with his contemporaries." Do you see a remarkable genealogy? "Noe," it says, "was a man." Notice also the ordinary name given the

good man applicable to us all rather than a title of distinction. You see, since the other people had lost the status of human beings through falling into the pleasures of the flesh, this man (Scripture says) retained the character of a human alone among such a vast multitude. This, after all, is when a man becomes human, when he practices virtue: it is not having the appearance of a human being—eyes, nose, mouth, cheeks and other features—that establishes the human being; these, in fact, are parts of the body. I mean, we would call a human being the man who retains the character of a human being. But what is the character of a human being? Being rational. Why so? Someone will say, Weren't those others rational also? Still, it is not merely this attribute, but also being virtuous and avoiding evil and getting the better of improper passions, following the Lord's commands—this is what makes a human being.

(10) For proof that Scripture's habit is not to bestow the title of human being on those who practice evil and neglect virtue, listen to the words of God, as we were saying yesterday, "My spirit is not to remain with these human beings on account of their being carnal;"¹⁰ in other words, he is saying, I regaled these people with a being¹¹ constituted of flesh and spirit; but as though composed of flesh only, they thus neglect virtue in a spiritual manner and have now proved to belong completely to the flesh. Do you see how on account of their wickedness it calls them flesh and not human beings? Again, as you will probably discover, Sacred Scripture proceeds to name them earth on account of their being completely taken up with earthly thoughts: it says, remember, "Now, the earth was corrupt in God's sight," speaking not about the material earth but naming its inhabitants earth. Elsewhere, however, it names them neither flesh nor earth, nor does it consider them to be in this life for the reason that they are devoid of virtue. I mean, listen to the inspired author as he shouts out aloud in the middle of the metropolis of Jerusalem where there

10. Gen 6.3.

11. The sense seems to require here *ousia* in the text rather than *exousia*, and De Montfaucon suggests the emendation.

were such countless numbers of people, such a vast multitude, "I came and there was no one to be seen. I called and there was no one to heed me"¹²—not because they weren't there but because, though being there, they were no better off than not being there at all. Again in another place it says, "Hurry about and see if there is someone practicing judgment and righteousness, and I will be gracious."¹³

(11) Do you see how Holy Scripture knows how to call human only the person practicing virtue and doesn't think the others are human, calling them instead flesh at one time and earth at another? Hence at this place, too, in promising to list the genealogy of the good man it says, "Noe was a human being." You see, he alone was a human being, whereas the others weren't human beings; instead, while having the appearance of human beings they had forfeited the nobility of their kind by the evil of their intention, and instead of being human they reverted to the [202] irrationality of wild animals. Sacred Scripture assigns the names of wild beasts to human beings, rational creatures that they should be, in the event of their lapsing into evil and falling prey to irrational passions; listen for example to its words, "They turned into rutting horses."¹⁴ See how it gives them the animal's name on account of their unbridled lust. Elsewhere, on the other hand, it says, "Poison of serpents on their lips,"¹⁵ here it highlights their resemblance to the animal's trickery and duplicity. Again, it calls them dumb dogs.¹⁶ And again, "Like a deaf adder that blocks its ears,"¹⁷ referring to their stopping their ears against instruction in virtue. You would find many other names imposed by Sacred Scripture on people seduced by their indifference into bestial passions. You can see this not only in the Old Testament but also in the New;¹⁸ listen to John the Baptist addressing the Jews, "Brood of vipers, who has

12. Isa 50.2.

14. Jer 5.8.

16. Isa 56.10.

18. For a similar diatribe against the animal tendencies of those who forsake virtue, based on a similar catena of OT and NT texts, see Homily 12—

13. Jer 5.1 in a variant reading.

15. Ps 140.3.

17. Ps 58.4.

another example of the (at times verbatim) resemblance between different homilies and sermons. See Introduction (2) and (8) in FOTC 74.

shown you how to flee from the wrath to come?"¹⁹ So do you see how here also by naming the animal it implied the duplicity of their intent?

(12) So what could be more wretched than those who practice evil, when they are deprived of the right to be called by the very name of human beings and endure heavier punishment for the reason that despite receiving many promptings from nature they willingly forsook them in their headstrong career into wickedness? Since therefore all the people of that time rendered themselves unworthy of the name and of being called human beings whereas this good man amidst such a dearth of virtue gave evidence of an extraordinary degree of his own virtue, Sacred Scripture begins its account of the man's genealogy with the words, "Now, Noe was a human being." We can find in the case of another good person also this name applied in place of lavish praise, and through this name instead of all other means his meticulous practice of virtue is heralded to the skies. Who is that? Blessed Job, that protagonist of reverence, that world champion, alone capable of tolerating incurable ills, the recipient of countless blows from that evil demon without sustaining injury, like steel able to withstand every blow, not only unbowed by such mighty billows but even emerging superior to the flood, suffering the world's ills in his person yet coming through the experience with even greater lustre. I mean, not only did the rate of the onset of disasters not depress him but it even prompted him to more fervent thanksgiving, and through it all he demonstrated his personal gratitude, dealing the devil a well-deserved blow and showing him that his efforts were in vain and that he was kicking against the goad. Accordingly the loving God praised this holy man for his contests and such difficult struggles, and he sings his praises in addressing the devil, "'Have you taken heed of my servant Job, that there is no one like him on earth, a person beyond reproach, good, true, reverent, proof against any evil-doing?'"²⁰ Do you notice

19. Matt 3.7; Luke 3.7.

20. Job 1.8; in a variant of the LXX.

that he first sings his praises in terms of the name common to his kind? “‘Have you taken heed,’” he says, “‘of my servant Job, that there is no one like him?’”²¹ Of course, everyone was like him, not on the score of virtue but on the basis of appearance; this, however, is not what makes a human being—rather, avoidance of evil and practice of virtue.

(13) Do you see which people Sacred Scripture is prepared to call human beings? Hence, when even from the outset the Creator of all saw the creature he had made, he said, “‘Let us make a human being in our image [203] and likeness’”—that is to say, to have control both of all visible things and the passions arising within him; to have control, not to be controlled. If, however, they forfeit this control and would rather be controlled than have control, they lose also their human status and change their name to that of wild animals. Hence, of course, in this case too Sacred Scripture is anxious to commend this good man’s virtue in the words, “These are the generations of Noe. Noe was a just person.” Behold also another remarkable form of commendation, “just”: through this term it suggests this complete kind of virtue. It is customary with us to apply the word “just” to people practicing every virtue. Then, for you to learn how he arrived at the very pinnacle of virtue, which was required of our human nature at that time also, it says, “a just man; he was faultless by comparison with his contemporaries.” He had fulfilled every obligation, the text says, that should be discharged by a person who had opted for virtue (the sense, after all, of “faultless”), neglecting nothing, falling short in nothing. It was not that he did this right and that wrong; rather, he was faultless in every respect, this after all being required of him. Then, so as to make the good man appear more conspicuous by comparison, it says, “He was faultless by comparison with his contemporaries”; at that period, amidst his perverted generation, bent as they were on such terrible evil, prepared to give evidence of not even a trace of virtue.

21. This time Chrysostom adopts a different reading of the text, attested to in our MSS of the LXX.

(14) So amidst that generation, in those times, this just man not only gave evidence of virtue but also proved faultless and perfect in every respect in arriving at the highest pinnacle of virtue. You see, as I said before, it always shows a high calibre of virtue to do the right thing in face of opposition and to give evidence of assiduity amidst discouragement. On this basis, of course, this good person is judged worthy of greater plaudits. Nor does Sacred Scripture cease its commendation at this point: it proceeds to show us the surpassing degree of his virtue and the fact that he received the verdict of heaven when it says, "He was faultless by comparison with his peers," and adds, "Noe pleased God." Such was the calibre of his virtue as to win approval from God. "Noe pleased God," it says, meaning that he proved acceptable to God and was pleasing to that unsleeping eye on account of his good deeds; the conduct of his life attracted divine favor and not only delivered him from the wrath due to fall on everyone but also made him a suppliant for the others. "Noe pleased God," the text says, remember. Who could have a happier lot than Noe's, being in a position to demonstrate such virtue as to have the Lord of all as your eulogist?

(15) Since, therefore, he behaved in this way, his lot was in the view of any thinking person preferable to all riches, any kind of fame, influence or any other human distinction; to the person having sincere love for God this would be more desirable than a kingdom. You see, true kingship is this, being in a position to win the Lord's benevolence and clemency through the excellence of one's lifestyle. After all, the reason we ought to be in fear and dread of hell is not the undying fire, the terrible punishments, the unremitting retribution, but rather offending such a good Lord and finding ourselves outside his benevolence. So likewise we ought to show enthusiasm [204] for that kind of kingship for this reason, out of love for him and to enjoy his favor. You see, as it is worth more than a kingdom to have our loving Lord kindly disposed to us, so it would be a worse fate than hell's fire to fall from his favor.

(16) Do you see how much benefit the good man's mere

name proved to be an occasion of, and how great a treasure of inspiration this remarkable man's genealogy gave rise to? Accordingly, let us imitate the norms of Sacred Scripture, and if we wish to list people's genealogies, let us not cite parents, grandparents and great-grandparents but expose instead the virtue of the person with the genealogy. This, you see, is the best style of genealogy; what good is it to have famous forebears distinguished by virtue if the person himself is bereft of excellence of life? or, on the other hand, what disadvantage could it be to spring from lowly and undistinguished parents and ancestors if the person himself is adorned with great virtue? This good person too, who was of such high calibre and had won God's favor, did not come from parents of such notoriety: Sacred Scripture doesn't record their virtue. Nevertheless, he prevailed over such stern obstacles, hindered though he was so severely, and managed to reach the very pinnacle of virtue, so that you might learn that for the person prepared to stay alert and on guard and to take good care of his own salvation, nothing is an obstacle. You see, just as people who slip into indifference are harmed even by chance events, so if we were prepared to be on the alert, even if there were innumerable people enticing us to evil, they could in no way harm us by their efforts, just as this good man too could not be made lukewarm about virtue despite the number of those trying.²²

(17) Accordingly, let no one blame somebody else and impute the guilt to others, but attribute it all to his own negligence. Why do I say to others? Let no one think the devil himself is sufficient to bar the way leading to virtue: he deceives and undoes the negligent, but he really can't impede or coerce. Experience itself makes clear that, provided we are prepared to be on the alert, we can display such resolution that despite numerous efforts to impel us down the way of

22. As mentioned in Introduction (13) and (17) and frequently in footnotes in FOTC 74, the capital sin in Chrysostom's eyes is *rhathumia*, "indifference," "sloth," "neglect," "laxity." From Eve onwards all the Genesis villains are monuments of indifference, all the heroes exemplars of *prothumia*, "enthusiasm," as Noe here.

wickedness we will resist their evil design, prove stronger than any steel and block our ears against the inducements of those counseling knavery. Whenever, on the contrary, we become negligent, no matter if there is no one to counsel or undo us, we would be impelled by our own impulse to lay at anchor in wickedness. You see, if responsibility did not rest in our choice and in our control over our attitudes, and if the loving God had not made our nature independent, it would have been inevitable for everyone sharing our nature and affected by the same passions to be all evil or all virtuous. When, however, we see our peers, even those handicapped by the same passions, not afflicted with the same weaknesses as ourselves but ordering nature with steady judgement, surviving wild impulses, reining in desire, suppressing rage, shunning envy, uprooting jealousy, spurning the pangs of greed, thinking little of reputation, mocking all the favor of this world, and setting their heart on true glory and prizing God's approval above all visible goods, [205] is it not patent that in the wake of heavenly grace they are able to achieve these noble feats by their own efforts while we fall victim to our own negligence, betray our salvation and leave ourselves bereft of favor from above?

(18) Hence, I beg you, let us consider these matters, constantly meditate on them, and never blame the devil but rather our own negligent attitude. I say this, not out of a desire to discharge him of any condemnation—perish the thought: he goes about like a lion to seize his prey, roaring and stalking a victim to devour.²³ Rather, my intention is to put us more on the alert lest we think ourselves above reproach, advance readily in this way towards wickedness and utter those frivolous words, Why did God let such a wicked creature loose to ensnare and overthrow us? These words, after all, would be a mark of deepest ingratitude. Instead, take this thought to heart, that the particular reason that he turned him loose was that under the pressure of fear and on the lookout for the enemy's assault we might display great

23. Cf. 1 Pet. 5.8.

alertness and constant watchfulness, and in the hope of reward and as guarantee of those ineffable eternal blessings we might make light of the difficulties of virtue. Why are you amazed if that was the reason he let the devil loose, caring as he does for our salvation, anxious to stir us from our indifference, and providing us with some title to reward? His purpose in preparing hell itself was that the fear of punishment and the unbearable character of its torments might impel us towards the kingdom. Do you see the Lord's inventive love? how he does everything and adopts stratagems not only to save those created by him but also to regale them with ineffable blessings? For this reason, too, he endowed us with free will, and implanted in our nature and our conscience the knowledge of evil and of virtue, gave the devil free rein and threatened us with hell so that we might not have experience of hell but have the good fortune to reach the kingdom.

(19) Why are you surprised if to this end he has devised all those stratagems and countless others? He who by nature was in the bosom of the Father deigned to take the form of a servant,²⁴ to submit himself to all other bodily conditions, to have a woman for mother, to be born of a virgin, to be carried in the womb for nine months, to be wrapped in swaddling clothes, to be thought the son of Joseph, Mary's husband, to grow up gradually, to be circumcised, to offer sacrifice, to suffer hunger and thirst and weariness, finally to meet his death, and not simply death but that death thought most shameful—I mean crucifixion. All of this was accepted for us and our salvation by the Creator of everything, the one who never changes, who brings everything from non-being to being, who looks down upon the earth and makes it tremble,²⁵ the splendor of whose glory not even the Cherubim, those incorporeal powers, cannot see but cover their eyes with their wings as they reveal the marvel to us;²⁶ he whose praise angels, archangels and countless hosts forever sing—he it is who for us and for our salvation deigned to become man,

24. Cf. Phil 2.7.

26. Cf. Isa 6.2-3.

25. Ps 104.32.


plotted for us the way of exemplary living and bequeathed to us adequate instruction by the example he personally gave in assuming the same nature as ours.²⁷

(20) Accordingly, what excuse remains for us, [206] now that this example has been set us for our salvation, if we were going to render it all to no avail by forfeiting our salvation through indifference in these matters? Hence I beseech you to be on the alert and not simply follow the pattern set by others, but give careful attention to your own life each day and be clear about what sins you commit and what good deeds you do. Let us in this way proceed to the correction of our sins so that we may win favor from on high, prove acceptable to God like this good man, and have the good fortune to reach the kingdom of heaven, thanks to the grace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, honor and power, now and forever, for ages of ages. Amen.

27. This is one of the passages where Chrysostom's traditional appreciation of the Incarnation emerges most conspicuously (cf. Homilies 27 and 58), providing the basis for his theology of Scripture as the incarnate Word of God. As such it is always balanced, as here, with Chrysostom's other basic conviction, of divine transcendence. On these two verities stood firm Antioch's approach to Scripture. See my article, "Incarnation."

HOMILY 24

"Now, Noe had three sons, Shem, Cham, Japheth. Now, the earth was corrupt in God's eyes, and was filled with lawlessness."¹

HE [206] BENEFIT THAT CAME to us from the good man Noe's genealogy yesterday was not by chance: we recognized the unusual style of a genealogy, and we saw the good man's praise sung not for the celebrity of his forebears but for the virtue of his own behavior, because of which he also received such a wonderful testimony from Sacred Scripture. "Noe was a just person," it said, remember; "he was faultless by comparison with his contemporaries. Noe pleased God."² We concentrated all yesterday's instruction, you recall, on those brief words. It is, after all, the nature of the divine sayings to reveal great riches of thought in a few words, and to bestow untold treasure on those endeavoring to make a precise study of them. Hence, of course, I beseech you, let us never pass heedlessly by the contents of Sacred Scripture, but even if it is a list of names or an outline of history let us descry carefully the treasure hidden there. For this reason, after all, Christ himself said, "Search the Scriptures."³ The sense of what is written cannot be discovered on the surface at any point but requires of us careful study if nothing of what is concealed in its depths is to escape our

1. Gen 6.10–11.

2. Gen 6.9.

3. John 5.39—something of a manifesto for Chrysostom and his school, who, unlike the Alexandrian tendency to use the scriptural text as a point of departure, instead stay with the text and subject it to close scrutiny, going below the surface to see what is concealed in its depths, as Chrysostom so often claims. For the difference between the two schools, see D. S. Wallace-Hadrill's essay, "The Interpretation of the Biblical Record" in his *Christian Antioch* (Cambridge, 1982), ch. 2.

notice. Now, if the mere naming of our nature—I mean the word “human being” (ἄνθρωπος)—provided the occasion of so much benefit yesterday, how much advantage will we gain if we approach the matters in Scripture with attention and alert mind?

(2) We have, you see, a loving Lord, and when he sees us anxious to learn and demonstrating a keen appetite for understanding the divine sayings, he doesn't allow us to want for anything; instead, he immediately enlightens our thinking, bestows illumination from himself, and in his inventive wisdom he implants in our soul the whole of his trustworthy instruction. Hence, to encourage us to this practice and render us more enthusiastic, he declared worthy of blessing those who give evidence of such keen appetite when he said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, because they shall have their fill.”⁴ See the wisdom in the instruction: he did not merely encourage through the blessing, but also in the phrase, “those who hunger and thirst after righteousness,” he taught his listeners the great degree of enthusiasm with which they ought proceed to the study of the spiritual sayings. In other words, he is saying, just as those under the impulse of hunger hurry to food with unheard of enthusiasm, and those burning with great thirst come to drink with alacrity, in just the same way ought we, like people starving and thirsting, come to spiritual instruction. [207] Such people, you see, not only prove worthy of blessing but also secure the object of their desire. “They will have their fill,” Scripture says, after all—that is, they will be filled: they will fulfil their spiritual desire. Since, therefore, we have such a Lord, so good, so generous, come now, let us have recourse to him and win favor from him so that he may out of fidelity to his own loving kindness enlighten our thinking with a view to discerning the force of the Holy Scriptures, while you for your part should with great enthusiasm, like people starving and thirsting, receive the spiritual teaching. After all, even though we are lowly and of no account, perhaps the good

4. Matt 5.6.

Lord, anxious as he is to help, will take steps for your sake and for your salvation to provide us with a sermon in opening our mouth for his glory and your edification. Accordingly let us direct all our effort to securing grace from on high, invoke the one who gives understanding to the blind and helps the tongue of the mute speak distinctly, and expound the text read just now so that whatever he supplies out of fidelity to his own loving kindness we may be able to put before your good selves.

(3) But give me your full attention, I beseech you, and attend carefully to what is said, putting aside all your worldly concerns so that we may be able to sow our spiritual seed, as it were, in a rich and productive pasture, all weeds and thorns uprooted. "Now, these are the generations of Noe," the text reads. "Noe was a just man; he was faultless by comparison with his contemporaries. Noe pleased God."⁵ Yesterday the presentation of our teaching came to a close at this point; so we need to put what remains before you. "Now, Noe had three sons, Shem, Cham, Japheth."⁶ It was not without purpose that Sacred Scripture indicated to us both the period of time and the number of the good man's sons: in this case too it wanted obliquely to bring out the extraordinary degree of his great virtue. Having said above that "Noe was five hundred years old,"⁷ it then added, "He had three sons," teaching us the surpassing greatness of his continence, and this despite the fact that all the people of the time gave themselves up to such incontinence and gave evidence of much lechery, and all his contemporaries rushed headlong into evil. I mean, listen to the words of Sacred Scripture: "Now, the Lord saw that the vices of human beings were multiplied on the earth, and everyone gave themselves up wholly to pondering evil from their youth,"⁸ clearly showing us that young people surpassed

5. Gen 6.9.

6. Gen 6.10.

7. Gen 5.32.

8. Gen 6.5, with an individual final phrase replacing "day in day out" as in Chrysostom's previous quotation of the standard LXX text of this verse in Homily 22—hardly a surprising "lapse" for a preacher in such a lengthy quotation, but index again that these homilies were in fact delivered and not simply composed for delivery.

their superiors in age and the elderly proved by no means inferior to the young in folly, and that the age of innocence demonstrated strong inclination to evil.

(4) So Scripture's purpose is that we may learn how the good man remained alone in fighting the battle of temperance, not to mention his other virtues, while all others displayed great frenzy and fury, until he reached the age of five hundred. You see, after saying, "Noe was five hundred years old," it then adds, "Noe had three sons." Do you see, dearly beloved, the good man's extraordinary temperance? I mean, surely we won't heedlessly pass these matters by; let us instead consider that period of time and the wickedness that surfaced in the whole human race on account of extreme indifference, and notice the degree of virtue and reverence for God that distinguished him in restraining the impulse of desire over such a long period of time, [208] going contrary to everyone else and refraining not only from illicit association but also from what was customary and in fact above reproach. Scripture says, "Noe had three sons, Shem, Cham and Japheth. Now, the earth was corrupt in God's eyes, and was filled with lawlessness." It seems to me the good man was responding to God's plan in both refraining from association at this time and also having these children. I mean, since disaster was about to overwhelm the world on account of the extent of wickedness and the surpassing evil, the loving God by contrast wanted to let the good man survive like some root or leaven so that in the wake of the world's destruction he might be the beginning of people destined to appear later. For this reason he had three children after five hundred years and stopped at that, showing through this conduct that he had acted in accord with the loving kindness which God would show to the human race.

(5) For proof that these words are no idle conjecture, consider the precision of Scripture: when it said that the good man had three sons, it immediately added, "Now, the earth was corrupt in God's eyes, and was filled with lawlessness." Do you see the important distinction being made, beyond all telling, between people of the same nature? I mean, while in

the case of the good man Scripture said, "Noe was a just man, faultless by comparison with his contemporaries," in the case of all the rest it said, "Now, the earth was corrupt in God's eyes, and was filled with lawlessness." It calls the crowd of human beings by the name of the earth. You see, since all their doings were in fact earthly, consequently he implies their lowliness and the excess of their wickedness by the name of the earth. I mean, just as in the case of the firstformed, after his Fall and the loss of the glory that enveloped him previously, God said in submitting him to the punishment of death, "'Earth you are, and to earth you are to return,'"⁹ in just the same way here too, since the intensity of their wickedness was extreme, the text says, "Now, the earth was corrupt." It did not simply say, "Now the earth was corrupt," but, "in God's eyes, and it was filled with lawlessness." By saying, "It was corrupt," it suggested all their wickedness. I mean, we can't say that they rendered themselves guilty of one or two sins; rather, they committed every crime with reckless abandon—hence it added, "and the earth was filled with lawlessness." Not idly or by chance did they make evil their practice; instead, they gave evidence of every sin with utter fanaticism. See how for the future it refuses to allow them even the slightest memory but calls them by the name of the earth, highlighting both the excess of their evil and also the magnitude of God's anger. "Now, the earth was corrupt," the text says, "in God's eyes," that is, their whole behavior was at variance with God's directions, going contrary to God's commands and betraying through their own indifference the teaching implanted in their human nature. "And the earth was filled with lawlessness," the text says.

(6) Do you see, dearly beloved, how great an evil sin is, how it even renders human beings unworthy of being called by their own name in future? Listen further to what follows: "The Lord God saw that the earth was utterly corrupt."¹⁰ See again their being called earth. Then, after calling them earth once, twice and a third time, lest anyone make the mistake of

9. Gen 3.19.

10. Gen 6.12.

thinking this was said of the material earth the text goes on, "because all flesh had utterly corrupted their ways upon earth." Even here it did not deign to call them human beings; rather, its intention is by using only the name "flesh" to indicate to us that these remarks are not made about the earth but about people, clad as they are in flesh and expending their energies in earthly pursuits. You see, it is the habit of Scripture, as we often say to your good selves, [209] to give the name "flesh" to those who exhibit a carnal way of thinking and never set their sights on anything lofty, as Paul also says, "Now, those who are in the flesh are incapable of pleasing God."¹¹ Why is that? Is not the speaker himself clad in flesh? He doesn't mean, however, that those clad in flesh are incapable of pleasing God—rather, those who put no store by virtue but whose thoughts are totally carnal and who are caught up in pleasures of that kind, paying no attention to their soul, incorporeal and intellectual as it is. Sacred Scripture therefore taught us through these words the great number of their sins, the excess of their wickedness, the awful degree of God's anger, and the fact that on account of their studious attention to illicit behavior Scripture called them earth once, twice and a third time and gave them the name flesh, removing from them the name of the nature they shared in common, and demonstrating through the sequel God's ineffable love for us and the extraordinary degree of his considerateness. What in fact does it say? "God said to Noe."¹²

(7) See the surpassing extent of his goodness; like one friend with another he now shares with the good man word of the punishment he is about to inflict on the human race, and says, "'In my view the whole human race has reached its limit, in so far as the earth is filled with lawlessness on their account. Lo, I am going to destroy them and the earth.'" What does that mean, "'In my view the whole human race has reached its limit'"? I have shown extreme longsuffering, he is saying, not wanting to inflict the punishment I have in mind to inflict; but since the great excess of their sins brought

11. Rom 8.8.

12. Gen 6.13.

them to the very limit, a stop must now be put to it and their wickedness halted lest it get right out of hand. The text says, remember, "In my view the whole human race has reached its limit." See here too how, as he said before, "everyone ponders,"¹³ so too in this case, "the whole human race." In other words, everyone is in agreement, they were hell-bent on lawlessness, he is saying, and it is impossible to find in all that crowd anyone setting any value on virtue. "In my view," the text says, remember, "the whole human race has reached its limits." "The limit," that is, the limit has been passed when the blow had to fall and the spread of the ulcer had to be checked. "In my view the whole human race has reached its limits," just as if there were no one taking notice, and no one likely to require an account of their sins, they gave themselves up to illicit behavior, not considering that it is impossible to escape my notice, the one who has bestowed upon them their existence, favored them with body and soul, and supplied them with an abundance of so many good things. Accordingly, "in my view the whole human race has reached its limits."

(8) Then, as if to offer the good man an explanation and show that the excess of their sins provokes him to such anger, he says, "in so far as the earth is filled with lawlessness on their account." That is to say, surely they've neglected nothing, he means, that could induce them to wickedness? They had given evidence of such extremes that their wickedness then erupted and filled the whole earth with evil. This, to be sure, is the reason I am destroying them and the earth. "Lo, I am going to destroy them and the earth," he says. Since they had anticipated their own destruction through their lawless behavior, accordingly I call down on them utter ruin and bring into effect their disappearance and the earth with them, so that the earth may be able to gain some purification and be cleared of the filth of so many sins.

(9) Consider, I ask you, [210] the kind of spirit this good man was probably in at that point as he heard this from the

13. Gen 6.5.

Lord. I mean, even if he was aware of his own great virtue, nevertheless he did not receive the news without sorrow. After all, good people are a kindly lot, and they would readily put up with anything for the sake of other people's salvation. So how could it be otherwise than that this remarkable man was distressed at these words to ponder already in his mind the universal destruction and the annihilation of the whole of creation, perhaps even without a suspicion of some brighter prospect for himself? You see, at this stage nothing was yet clear to him. Lest therefore his thoughts be completely disturbed and he be unable to pluck some little comfort from amidst all this immensity of depression, God, after teaching him the excess of their wickedness and that the time was now fast approaching for requiring them to undergo a profound setback, said to him, Whereas ruin will overtake them all alike, "you, on the contrary, make for yourself an ark."¹⁴ What is the meaning of "you, on the contrary"? Since you have had no part in their evil but have rather pursued your whole life in a virtuous way, accordingly I direct you to build an ark for yourself "of hewn timber, freshly cut. You will make cabins in the ark, and you will cover it with pitch inside and out. It is to be three hundred cubits long, five hundred wide and three hundred high. You will gather material to make the ark, and round it off a cubit from the top, making a door on the sides and building two or three decks below the waterline."¹⁵

(10) Notice God's considerateness, his ineffable power and his love beyond all telling. His care for the good man emerges in various ways—in directing him to build the ark for himself, in instructing him how to build it, its breadth, its height; he lavishes upon him the greatest encouragement, suggesting to him his hopes of salvation in building the ark and wanting those guilty of such awful sins to be brought by the building

14. Gen 6.14.

15. Gen 6.14-16, with some departures from the Hebrew by the LXX in places, resulting in at least one nonsense phrase, as if the unusual Hebrew word was mistaken for another. The LXX ship is a hundred times the Hebrew one (which Speiser estimates at 43,000 tons), a veritable super-tanker.

of the ark to an awareness of their conduct and to come to a change of heart without experiencing his anger. I mean, it was no brief time that was offered them on this further occasion for a change of heart by means of the building of the ark; it was very lengthy, sufficient (had they not been unresponsive) for them to stoop to a correction of their faults. You see, the chances were that each of them, on seeing the good man constructing the ark, would be ashamed of his responsibility for the work; then, on realizing God's anger, they would come to an awareness of their own sins, provided they were ready to do so. But these people did not even gain anything from the incident, not because it was beyond them but because their wills were set against it.

(11) Accordingly, after God had given the good man instructions about building the ark, he shared with him also the secret of the kind of punishment he was due to inflict on them, and said, You build it as I have directed, while I for my part will arrange things securely in your regard when you complete the building. "For my part, however—lo, I am about to bring a flood of water upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which there is a breath of life under heaven: whatever is on earth will perish."¹⁶ See how through this threat, too, he shows them the magnitude of their sins by saying, I will inflict this punishment on rational and irrational creatures alike. I mean, since they had forfeited their preeminence and had reverted to the behavior of brutes, there would be no difference in the punishment: "I am about to bring [211] a flood of water to destroy all flesh in which there is a breath of life under heaven." Cattle, birds, beasts, fourfooted creatures—everything under heaven will be destroyed. That you may learn that nothing would be spared, he says, "Whatever is on the earth will perish." The world now needs purifying, you see, but don't let this disturb you or unsettle your mind; seeing the incurable condition of the ulcer, I must stem the flow of evil lest they render themselves liable to worse punishments. Hence even in this instance, out of fidelity to my own

16. Gen 6.17.

loving kindness and tempering my anger with goodness, I am applying this punishment in a way that will be painless and not felt by them. You see, it is not that I am ignoring the magnitude of their sins nor what they in fact deserve; rather, I am looking ahead to later developments, and thus I want to impose a fitting punishment on these people and protect from harm those who follow in the future.

(12) So don't be downcast or be afraid when you hear this; even if they are overtaken by a penalty suited to their crime, yet "I will make my covenant with you."¹⁷ Since all your predecessors rendered themselves unworthy and did not prove to have the right attitude to my commands, it is with you I will now make my covenant. The first formed human being, despite so many kindnesses, fell victim to deceit and broke my commands, and the son born to him fell in turn into the same abyss of wickedness, so he too received everlasting punishment in the curse imposed on him. Yet not even his punishment brought those coming after him to their senses; instead, they sinned with such wild abandon as to be declared unworthy of their forebears. Later, of course, I found Enoch preserving the features of virtuous living, and so on account of the great satisfaction he achieved in my sight I took him away elsewhere while still living so as to show others who practice virtue the extent of the rewards they are accorded, and out of a wish that people in future would be imitators of him and follow in his footsteps. So, since everyone is now wholly involved in wickedness and I have found you alone amidst all this throng capable of reversing the transgression of your first parents, it is with you I will make my covenant. After all, the conduct of your life shows you to be trustworthy in regard to respect for the commands I have given.

(13) Then, in case that good man should still have misgivings despite hearing all this, being as he would be the only one to survive, God said further, as though to encourage him, "You, however, are to board the ark, and with you your sons, your wife and your sons' wives." You see, even if these peo-

17. Gen 6.18.

ple were much inferior to the good man in virtue, nevertheless they did not show the excessive wickedness of the others. They enjoyed the benefit of salvation on two grounds in particular. Firstly, for their esteem for the good man: it is the loving God's way to show regard for his own servants and in many cases to grant them the favor of other people's salvation, something he did also in the case of blessed Paul, the world's teacher, who spread everywhere the rays of his own teaching. Remember when he was sailing to Rome, a great storm at sea blew up and all on board were afraid of their lives and despaired of any secure hope because of the violence of the deluge; Paul called on them all in these words: "Take courage, sirs: there will be no loss of life among you, only the ship. You see, a messenger of the God whom I serve appeared to me this night, [212] saying, Don't be afraid, Paul, God has done you the favor of saving all your company.'"¹⁸ Do you see how the man's virtue had the effect of achieving the salvation of those associates of his? However, it was not merely virtue but also the Lord's loving kindness. In just the same way in the present case also this happened on one account; but it was also on another account, as God wanted some leaven and root to be left of the race that would exist in the future—not because it was impossible for God to fashion humanity all over again and build up the race from a single person, but because he decided in this direction out of fidelity to his own goodness.

(14) Now, notice God's goodness also in the sequel. I mean, as he said in threatening punishment that cattle, reptiles, birds and wild beasts would also perish along with the human race, so too in this instance for the good man's sake he instructed that a pair of each species of these creatures be taken on board the ark so that there would be some seed and foundation for the colonies that would exist later. "Of all cattle," he says, "of all wild beasts and of all flesh you shall bring two by two into the ark to keep them alive with you; they will include male and female. Of every species of birds

18. Acts 27.22-24.

of all kinds, of every species of cattle, and of every species of reptiles of all kinds on earth, two by two of them all will come aboard to you, male and female, to be kept alive with you.'"¹⁹ Don't pass this by heedlessly, dearly beloved: have a thought for the great apprehension he caused in the good man at the thought of caring for all these creatures. After all, it wasn't sufficient for him to think of his wife, his sons and their wives; rather, he was also given in addition care and nourishment of so many animals. Wait a while, however, and you will see God's goodness and the way he relieves the concern besetting the good man. "'Now, for your part,'" he says, "'take a quantity of all the foods you will eat and load them on board with you; they will serve as food for you and them.'"²⁰ Don't think, he is saying, you have been left uncared for; see, I have given directions for everything necessary for your nourishment and the beasts' fodder to be put on board the ark to save you feeling the effect of hunger, and want, and the beasts perishing through not having suitable fodder.

(15) For proof of the wonderful commendation he was accorded on this account by the Creator of all, listen to what follows: "The Lord God said to Noe, 'Board the ark, you and your household.'"²¹ Then in order that we may learn that he not only saves the good man but also recompenses him for his efforts and rewards him for his virtue, he says, On that account I direct you to board the ark with your household "because I have found you to be law-abiding in my view by comparison with your contemporaries.'" A wonderful testimony and worthy of trust: what could be better than when the Creator himself, he who brings everything into being, delivers such a verdict [213] on the just man? "Because," he says, "'I have found you to be law-abiding in my view.'" This is true virtue when one gives evidence of it in the view of God, when that eye that is proof against deceit delivers its verdict. Then the loving God teaches us the criterion of virtue that he applied in that case to the just man (not that he in-

19. Gen 6.19-20, with minor discrepancies in listing between Hebrew, LXX and Chrysostom's text.

20. Gen 6.21.

21. Gen 7.1.

tends to apply the same criterion of virtue to everyone but rather looks for a different standard of virtue according to different situations), and says, "because I have found you to be law-abiding in my view by comparison with your contemporaries" who have reverted to such terrible evil, those wicked contemporaries of yours, who have given evidence of such dreadful ingratitude. "I have found you to be law-abiding," I have discovered you alone to be grateful, I have found you alone putting much store by virtue; you alone are seen to be law-abiding in my view, all the others going to perdition; you I direct to board the ark with all your household; you I bid to take on board the clean beasts seven by seven. Since he had previously given imprecise directions about taking on board a pair of every creature, he consequently now says, "The clean beasts seven by seven, the unclean two by two, male and female;" then to teach us the purpose of this he added, "to continue life throughout the earth."²²

(16) Now, it is worth investigating in this instance and seeing how the good man came to know which animals are clean and which are unclean. I mean, to this point this distinction had never been made which Moses later prescribed for the Jews. So how did he come to know of it? By himself, under the impulse of the teaching implanted in his own nature, and later at the dictate of reason as well. You see, nothing of what was made by God is unclean. I mean, how could we call unclean any of God's creatures, once approval had been bestowed on them from above and Sacred Scripture had declared that "God saw all that he had made and, behold, it was very good."²³ Now, however, nature under its own impulse gave evidence of this distinction. For proof that this is true, consider even now, I ask you, how in some places people abstain from some things as unclean and not customary, while others in their turn partake of them, custom leading them to do so. So in this way in the present case also innate awareness taught the good man what was useful for nourishment, on

22. Gen 7.2-3.

23. Gen 1.31.

the one hand, and what was unclean, on the other—not in fact but in people's opinion. On what basis, tell me, do we regard the ass as unclean, even though it feeds on nothing but hay, whereas we consider the other kinds of animals suitable for eating even though their food includes unclean items? This is the way the knowledge endowed by God on our nature becomes a teacher in these matters. Otherwise, however, you would have to say that God in giving him the direction also gave him a clear knowledge of these matters.

(17) But we have said enough about clean and unclean things. Now another question raises its head for us: why on earth was he to take the unclean animals two by two, but the clean seven by seven? Why not six or eight, but seven? Perhaps our sermon is being extended to great length; but if your strength hasn't failed and you're still willing, we will also give your good selves a brief instruction on these matters as far as God's grace allows. You see, many people give many fanciful interpretations of these matters and take occasion from them to make observations about numbers. You will very quickly realize, however, that it is a case not of close observation but of [214] men's inopportune meddling endeavoring to come up with things which have formed the basis of most heresies. I mean, for the most part (so that we may be seen from the abundance of evidence to put paid to those adducing arguments from their own reasoning) we find in Sacred Scripture a combination of two retained as the preferred number: when, for instance, he sent the disciples, he sent them two by two, there were twelve of them, the Gospels are four in number. But there is no need for me to go over this ground with your good selves, since you've been taught once before to block your ears to such matters.²⁴ It is necessary now, however, to say why he ordered the beasts to be embarked seven by seven. While his direction to embark more of the clean beasts was given with a view to encouraging the good man and those with him by reason of their sharing

24. De Montfaucon notes at this point that Chrysostom had good reason to warn his readers against extravagant theories about numbers by people like Philo, Clement of Alexandria, and even Eusebius.

in the enjoyment of these creatures, the fact of their going seven by seven would likewise have been a wonderful demonstration of the good man's filial reverence for God, if you were ready to study it. I mean, since the loving God was aware of the man's virtue and the fact that being a just man and the recipient of so much loving kindness from the Lord, including his escape from the effects of this terrible deluge, he intended to show his gratitude after being spared that fate and being set free from the constraints of life on the ark by offering sacrifice in thanksgiving for these events and what had happened to him and thus run the risk in so doing of losing a pair of animals, accordingly in his foreknowledge of the good man's attitude of thanksgiving God bade him put on board seven of every species of bird so that once the catastrophe had reached its end he might implement his purpose without impairing the even number of a species or all the birds together.

(18) You will learn this, of course, when the instruction advances further and we arrive at that part of the text; you will then see the good man has done this. As it is, you have learnt the reason why he was directed to embark the animals seven by seven. In future have no patience with those coming up with fanciful interpretations, contradicting Sacred Scripture and setting up notions out of their own head in opposition to the divine teachings. So, after he had given his directions clearly about the birds, about the clean animals and the unclean animals and their feed, he said to the just man, "After seven more days, behold, I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights, and I will wipe off the face of the earth all the life I have made, from human beings to cattle."²⁵ Notice, I ask you, in the words spoken at this point the extraordinary degree of his goodness, how in addition to his great longsuffering he now also delivers this forecast seven days ahead out of a wish to bring them to their senses through fear and to lead them to a change of heart. For proof that his purpose in foretelling was that his words

might not take effect, consider, I ask you, the Ninevites and consider how great the difference was in the two cases: despite hearing after so many years that disaster was at hand, they did not refrain from wickedness as the Ninevites had. We are, of course, inclined to be indifferent and to postpone reform when punishment lies in the future; but when we are on the verge of something that can cause us pain, then we are likely to humble ourselves and give evidence of change for the better. That in fact is what happened in the case of the Ninevites; when they heard that "after three days Ninevi will be demolished,"²⁶ not only did they not lose heart but they responded to the warning and practiced such abstinence [215] from evil and gave evidence of such scrupulous confession as to extend the matter of their confession even to wild animals—not that animals go to confession (how could they, after all, lacking speech as they do?) but with the purpose of winning the good Lord's love in their regard by means of these animals. What I mean is that, as the text says,²⁷ the king's retinue proclaimed a fast and ordered that cattle, beasts and all wild animals should take no food or drink; instead, the whole human race of the time put on sack cloth, including the king seated on his throne, and made long and vehement confession, without being sure that they would escape punishment. They said, you see, "Who knows if, in fact, God will change his mind about the harm he said he would do us?"²⁸

(19) Do you see pagans' gratitude? do you see how not even the shortage of time led them to be sluggish or made them lose heart? Notice also the people in the present text, who after so great a number of years heard that the deluge would come in seven days and yet were not converted like the Ninevites but rather were unaffected by any condition conducive to confessing that "our own choice was responsible for all

26. Jonah 3.4, where the LXX has three days in place of the Hebrew forty, perhaps (as De Montfaucon suggests) through confusion with the celebrated three day period Jonah spent earlier (2.1).

27. Cf. Jonah 3.7.

28. A paraphrase of Jonah 3.9.

the wickedness." I mean, behold these people—and people they were, too, of the same species as the Ninevites but not of the same disposition. Consequently, they did not meet the same fate: whereas the Ninevites escaped the catastrophe, the good God being content with their conversion in his characteristic love, the others were submerged and overtaken by disaster. The text says, remember, "'After seven more days I will send rain on the earth.'" Then, in his wish to increase their fear, he added, "'for forty days and forty nights.'" Why? Wasn't it possible for him, if he wanted, to send all the rain in one day? But why say in one day? in one moment! He does this of set purpose, however, intending at the one time to instill fear and to provide them with the opportunity of escaping the punishment, even if it be at the very gates. "I will wipe off the face of the earth," the text says, "'all the life I have made,'" from human beings to cattle. See how he makes this forecast once and again, and yet does not make any impact on them. He did all this, however, to teach us that it was just for him to inflict such a heavy punishment on them, and to avoid anyone's making ridiculous imputations by saying that if he had shown more longsuffering, doubtless they would have refrained from wickedness and returned to virtue. Hence he makes clear to us the number of years as well, and orders the building of the ark. After all this he also makes his forecast seven days ahead so as to stop the shameless mouths of those bent on speaking rashly. The text goes on, "Noe did everything the Lord God commanded him."²⁹ See how here too Sacred Scripture hails the just man's gratitude and obedience, teaching us that he neglected none of the commands but discharged them all, providing a demonstration in this way too of his characteristic virtue.

(20) Accordingly, let us in our turn imitate this good man and be zealous in the discharge of the commands [216] given us by God, and not despise the laws given us by God, but rather retain a lively memory of them and show haste in moving to their practice; let us not be indifferent in managing the

affairs of our salvation, especially as the greater measure of virtue is demanded of us the more we have enjoyed his help. Hence Christ also said, “‘If your goodness does not exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.’”³⁰ So let us consider this in our own regard, and far from heedlessly passing the saying by, let us think of the degree of punishment that awaits those who not only do not exert themselves to surpass those people but even have less to show than they, who do not refrain from venting their spleen on their neighbor, who do not keep their tongue clean of imprecations, who have no interest in protecting their eyes from harmful prospects, and are unwilling not only to treat kindly the person injuring them but also to show him favor, despite the Lord’s direction, “‘Let the person anxious to sue you and take your coat have your cloak as well.’”³¹ We, on the contrary, often endeavor to wrong our neighbor and even revenge ourselves on the one wronging us, despite the instruction we receive not only to love those who love us (after all, “even the tax collectors do as much,” Scripture says³²) but also to be well-disposed to those who hate us; nor do we show the same degree of love as those who love us.

(21) For this reason I am deeply distressed to see in us such a dearth of virtue, on the one hand, and the intensity of wickedness increasing day by day, on the other, not even the fear of hell arresting our decline into evil nor desire for the kingdom impelling us along the way of virtue. Instead, we are led by the nose, so to say, in the manner of cattle, and have no sense either of that fearful hour or of the laws given us by God, but rather go after people’s opinion and seek praise from them, not heeding the words of the gospel, “‘How can you believe, when you take credit from human beings and fail to seek that which is found with the only God?’”³³ On the other hand, just as those who seek the former lose the latter completely, so those who depend constantly on the latter don’t lose the former either. He had previously promised this, re-

30. Matt 5.20.

31. Matt 5.40.

32. Matt 5.46.

33. John 5.44 with a slight textual variant.

member, when he said, "Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be given you as well;"³⁴ all these things come to the person who has a longing for that goal. You see, the person who fits his mind with wings to fly away there spurns all present prosperity as though it did not exist. I mean, whenever the eyes of faith descry those ineffable goods, they do not even take notice of visible things—such is the difference in the two kinds of realities. I see no one, however, who esteems unseen realities above visible ones. Hence it is a cause of grief to me and an unrelenting ache in my heart that experience has not taught us this lesson, nor have God's promises nor the greatness of his gifts had the effect of converting us to desire for the kingdom; instead, still clinging to the ground we prefer things of earth to those of heaven, the present to the future, those things that disappear before coming into view to those that endure, present pleasure to lasting pleasure, the brief prosperity [217] of this present life to those unending ages.

(22) I know that these words irritate your ears, but pardon me for that. I say this in my zeal for your salvation and my wish that by being a little irritated here you will escape everlasting punishment rather than be somewhat beguiled and suffer unrelenting penalty. In other words, if you can put up with my talking and dispel the lethargy that had seized you previously, especially now that this short period of the holy season of Lent remains, you will be able to wipe away your sins and win much loving kindness from God. After all, the Lord has no need of many days or a long time: as long as we are willing, we will even in these two weeks achieve considerable correction of our faults. I mean, if he considered the Ninevites, when they had given evidence of a penance of three days, worthy of such loving kindness, so much the more will he be prepared not to overlook us—provided only that we give evidence of true repentance, give up evil and follow the way leading to virtue. After all, about them—I mean the Ninevites—Sacred Scripture testifies in these words: "God

34. Matt 6.33.

saw that each of them had turned from his evil way.”³⁵ Accordingly, if he sees us also changing course for virtue, turning away from evil and showing zeal for the performance of good works, he will accept our change of direction, rid us of the burden of our sins and lavish upon us gifts of his own. I mean, we are not so anxious for release from our sins or so long after our salvation as he shows enthusiasm for it and hastens to grant us release from them and to bring us to enjoyment of salvation.

(23) Hence, I beseech you, let us stir up our thinking, and let each person be his own examiner as to whether he has anything further to his credit in the time that has passed, whether he gained anything of advantage from this constant instruction, whether he reaped any benefit for strengthening his neighbor, whether he corrected any of his own faults, whether he gained any encouragement to philosophy from our daily exhortation. Let the good person direct attention to improving his good behavior and never relax this commendable performance. If, on the contrary, someone sees himself addicted to the same faults under the influence of a habit that rules his life, let him exert all his powers of reasoning, give an account of his sloth, and not hang back from making progress, but rather arrest the force of the evil habit at this point, stem its tide, put the spur to his powers of thought, apply himself to meditating on that dread day, imagine partaking of that fearful table, the brightness of the flame blazing from it, its searing intensity, the kind of attitude required of the guest, purified of every stain, of every defilement, and avoiding the onset of improper thoughts. Thus we may make ourselves ready in these intervening days and be able to purify ourselves as far as possible, partake of enjoyment there and be judged worthy of those ineffable goods promised to those who love him, thanks to the grace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be [218] glory, power and honor, now and forever, for ages of ages. Amen.

35. Jonah 3.10, paraphrased.

HOMILY 25

"Now, Noe was six hundred years old when the deluge came upon the earth."¹



I WANT [218] ONCE MORE TO TOUCH on the theme I broached to you, brethren, yesterday and set before you again the story of the good man Noe. You see, the good man's wealth of virtue was immense, and it is our duty to study it in detail as far as we possibly can and to draw great benefit from it for you. For your part, strain your attention, I beg you, so that none of the ideas contained there may escape you. It is necessary firstly, however, to remind your good selves to what point yesterday's teaching brought us so that we may resume the sermon from that point and in this way link up what we have said with what now remains to be said.

(2) So how did our instruction conclude? The text says, "The Lord God said to Noe, 'Board the ark, you and your household, because I have found you to be law-abiding before me in this generation. Take on board with you the clean beasts seven by seven, and the unclean two by two. You see, after seven more days I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights, and I will wipe off the face of the earth all the life I have made, from human beings to cattle.' Noe did everything the Lord God commanded him."² We brought the sermon to that point and concluded the instruction there. You recall just as well yourselves, of course, that we explained

1. Gen 7.6.

2. Gen 7.1-5, with textual differences from the quotation of these verses throughout Homily 24—which goes to document Baur's warning about the Fathers' erratic quotation of Scripture from memory (cf. FOTC 74, Introduction (15).)

to your good selves the reason why God directed that the clean beasts be embarked seven by seven but the unclean two by two.

(3) So, come now, today let us move on to the following verses, and see what Sacred Scripture describes to us after Noe's boarding the ark. You see, at this particular time we ought especially display great interest when on account of the season of fasting we have without interruption been enjoying your gracious attendance and have been free of temptation to gluttony, and with our mind alert we have been able to attend with precision to what is said.

(4) There is need, therefore, to say where today's reading takes its beginning. "Now, Noe was six hundred years old," the text says, "when the deluge came upon the earth." Pay attention, I beseech you, and let us not pass this verse by heedlessly; these brief words contain a hidden treasure, and provided we earnestly apply our attention, we shall be able to learn from them both the extraordinary degree of the Lord's loving kindness and the intensity of wickedness of people of that time. "Now, Noe," it says, "was six hundred years old." It was not idly that it taught us the good man's age, or merely for the purpose of our learning that figure itself of the good man's age; instead, because Sacred Scripture had previously taught us to the effect that "Noe was five hundred years old,"³ and after making known to us his age it had then recounted people's extreme tendency to wickedness and that their mind was set firmly on evil from their youth, accordingly God said, "My spirit is not to remain with these human beings on account of their being [219] carnal,"⁴ giving them a premonition of the extremity of his anger. Then, so as to give them a sufficient opportunity to change direction and avoid experiencing his anger, he says, "'Instead, they will have a life of a hundred and twenty years,'" as if to say, I will put up with them for another fifty years.⁵ You see, in those fifty years the

3. Gen 5.32.

4. Gen 6.3.

5. As De Montfaucon points out here and in Homily 23 where Chrysostom first commented on Gen 6.3, Chrysostom is making a moral point about

just man by means of his own name did not cease reminding them all and encouraging them, provided they were ready to heed him, to give up wickedness and change to virtue. Nevertheless, he is saying, even now I promise to put up with them for a hundred and twenty years so that they may employ the intervening time properly, shun evil and take up virtue instead. And far from being content with the promise of a hundred and twenty years, he orders the good man to build the ark so that the very sight of the ark may also provide them in turn with an adequate reminder and that no one would be unaware of the magnitude of the punishment due to be inflicted. After all, that very fact that that good man who had reached the very pinnacle of virtue was displaying such earnestness in building the ark should have been sufficient to put fear and anxiety into everyone with sense and to persuade them to placate this so kind and loving Lord.

(5) I mean, if those pagans (I'm referring to the Ninevites)⁶—I have to introduce them again, you see, so that by this means the extraordinary wickedness of these others may be contrasted with their great responsiveness. You see, our Lord at that time on that dread day—I mean the Day of Judgement—delivers his condemnation by bringing forward these servants and those, when it becomes clear that while all have enjoyed the same advantages and partaken of the same goods, not all have shared in the same degree of virtue; instead, he frequently makes a contrast between unequal parties so as to inflict the heavier condemnation on the victims of indifference. Hence he said in the Gospels, “Men of Ninevi will rise up at the Judgement with this generation and condemn them, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah and, behold, a greater than Jonah is here”⁷—as if to say that the pagans did not have the advantage of any such

human sin and divine forbearance to words intended dogmatically; Von Rad summarizes the Yahwist's intention: “God sets a maximum age beyond which man, who has increased his vital power in such an ungodly manner, cannot go” (*Genesis*, 114).

6. De Montfaucon comments here on Chrysostom's weakness for digressions, but admits that this is the longest of them all.

7. Matt 12.41.

solicitude, did not hear the teaching of the prophets, did not witness signs, did not see miracles, but simply heard words from one person saved from shipwreck that were capable of instilling into them a deep sense of despair and of driving them to such a feeling of helplessness as to make them even despise the words spoken by him, yet they not only did not scorn the prophet's words but were wrapt in three days' remorse⁸ and gave every sign of such strict and intense repentance as to revoke the Lord's sentence. These, then, are the people who will condemn this generation that had the advantage of the same solicitude, were nourished on the books of the inspired writers, witnessed each day's signs and wonders. Then, so as to show also the extraordinary degree of their unbelief as well as the Ninevites' responsiveness, he added, "because they repented at the preaching of Jonah and, behold, a greater than Jonah is here;" whereas they had sight of that unprepossessing person Jonah, welcomed the preaching he gave, and displayed a most rigorous repentance (he is saying), these others on the contrary, who had someone far [220] greater than Jonah and saw the very Creator of all passing time with them and daily working so many marvelous wonders—cleansing lepers, raising the dead, setting at rights disabilities of nature, driving out devils, curing diseases, granting forgiveness of sins with great authority—not even the same faith as the pagans did they display.

(6) Let us, however, return to the theme of our sermon so that you may see both the intensity of one party's ingratitude and the assiduity of the other's responsiveness, as well as the fact that whereas the latter agonized over their state for three days without despairing of their salvation but showing zeal for repentance, washing away their sins and rendering themselves worthy of the Lord's loving kindness, the others by contrast, while accepting the reprieve of a hundred and twenty years for repentance, made no further use of that period. Hence the Lord, on seeing the excess of their wickedness and observing that they had rushed headlong into grave evil, ap-

8. Cf. note 27, Homily 24.

plied to them rapid correction, removing the depravity of their wicked corruption and taking it out of his sight. For this reason the text says, "Noe was six hundred years old when the deluge came upon the earth." To this point we had learnt that when the Lord's anger occurred and he made this forecast, Noe was five hundred years old. When, however, the deluge was brought upon them, he was six hundred years old, so that a hundred years had passed in the meantime, and yet they gained no benefit from those hundred years, despite the advantage given them of so much instruction from Noe's building the ark.

(7) But perhaps someone might be anxious to find out why God had said, "They will have a life of a hundred and twenty years," and promised to show longsuffering for that length of time, and yet before the completion of that time brought on the disaster. This would be a remarkable demonstration of his loving kindness: when he saw them committing irreparable sins day after day and not only gaining nothing from his ineffable longsuffering but even developing worse ulcers, consequently he cut the time short lest they render themselves liable to worse punishment. And what punishment is worse than this, someone says? That punishment is worse, dearly beloved, more fearful and enduring which lasts into the world to come. In fact, for proof that some people, while not escaping punishment in the next life for making amends in this, will nevertheless endure a lighter one there on account of what happens here and will thus reduce the severity of those sanctions, listen to the words of Christ as he laments the fate of Bethsaida: "'Woe to you, Chorazim,'" he says, "'woe to you, Bethsaida, because if the miracles had taken place in Sodom that took place in you, they would long ago have repented in sackcloth and ashes. Hence I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgement than for you.'"⁹ Do you see, dearly beloved, how in the words, "'more tolerable,'" he showed that those also who paid such a penalty here by enduring that novel and

9. A conflation of Matt 11.21-24.

unusual kind of conflagration would, while still undergoing punishment there, nevertheless have a lighter one on account of their previous experience of such terrible anger here on earth?

(8) So, in the case of the people of Noe's time, lest by aggravating their [221] sins they might render themselves liable to worse punishment, the good and loving Lord, seeing their unrepentant attitude, reduced the period he had promised to allow in his longsuffering. In other words, just as in the case of people giving evidence of gratitude for the goodness characteristic of him he revokes the sentences delivered by him, welcomes their repentance, and lifts the penalty imposed on them, so too in this instance, when he promised to give them either certain goods or a period of repentance, but in fact saw they had proved unworthy, then too in turn he revoked his promises. Hence he said also by the inspired writer: "At long last I shall speak regarding nations and regarding kingdoms about destroying and overthrowing them; if they should repent, I too will repent of the things I have promised to do to them." And again, "At long last I shall speak regarding nations and regarding kingdoms about rebuilding them; if they should sin, I too will repent of the things I have promised to do to them.'"¹⁰ Do you see how he takes occasion from us for both the love and the anger he shows in our regard? Hence, of course, in this present case, since they had not taken proper advantage of the time, he shortened the period. For this reason, too, blessed Paul spoke against those who were not disposed to respond and were not accepting the offer of salvation given them through repentance: "Do you scorn the wealth of his kindness, his forbearance and his longsuffering, ignoring the fact that God's kindness leads you to repentance? You, on the contrary, in your hard and unrepentant heart are storing up wrath for yourself on that day of wrath, revelation and just judgment."¹¹ Do you see how this amazing teacher of the world clearly taught us that those who do not take proper advantage

10. A précis of Jer 18.7-10.

11. Rom 2.4-5.

of God's longsuffering offered to us with a view to our repentance render themselves liable to a heavier sentence and punishment? Hence in this case too the loving God, as if explaining and giving the reason why he brought on the deluge before the completion of the time, indicates to use the good man's age, saying, "Now, Noe was six hundred years old." After all, if they hadn't been prepared in those hundred years to repent, what would they have gained from those twenty years beyond going from bad to worse? In other words, to show the extraordinary degree of his ineffable love and goodness, he did not even decline to remind them seven days ahead of time of the onset of the deluge so that they might be stricken with the urgency of the situation and give evidence of some conversion.

(9) See also the Lord's loving kindness, how like a skillful physician he treated the disease in different ways: since their wounds were incurable, he provided them with such a lengthy period of time in his wish that they might come to their senses through the generous amount of time and he might be able to revoke the sentence of his anger. You see, it is always his fashion, concerned as he is for our salvation, to tell us ahead of time the punishments he is due to inflict, with the sole purpose in mind of not having to inflict them. If, of course, he had wanted to inflict them, he would not have told us; but he makes a point of giving us warning so that we may learn of it, be brought to our senses through fear, placate his anger and render his sentence null and void. Nothing, after all, so gladdens him as our conversion and our reverting from evil to virtue. Consider, therefore, how he treated this people's disease, too, first by giving them so much time of reprieve for repentance, then when he saw them unmoved [222] and profiting nothing from the length of time, with disaster at the very gates, so to say, he gives warning, not three days in advance, as in the case of the Ninevites, but seven days. I would, after all, be confident in saying, on account of my knowledge of the excess of our Lord's loving kindness, that even in seven days they could, had they been prepared to give real evidence of repentance, have avoided

experiencing the deluge. Since therefore neither such a lengthy reprieve nor the urgency of the situation was capable of affecting their evil behavior, he brought on the deluge in Noe's six hundredth year. "Now, Noe was six hundred years old," the text says, "when the deluge came upon the earth." Do you see, dearly beloved, how much benefit to us knowing the just man's age proved to be an occasion of, and knowing how old he was when the deluge came?

(10) Come now, let us move on to the following verses: when the deluge began, the text says, "Noe, his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives boarded the ark on account of the flood from the deluge. The clean birds, the unclean birds, the reptiles—all of them embarked two by two with Noe in the ark, male and female, as the Lord had commanded Noe."¹² It was not without purpose that he added the words, "just as the Lord had commanded Noe;" it was for the sake of adding further commendation of the just man, both because he had carried out everything just as the Lord had commanded and had omitted nothing of what he had been told by him. "It happened after seven days," just as the Lord had promised, it says, "that the flood from the deluge came upon the earth in the six hundredth year of Noe's life, on the twenty seventh day of the second month."¹³ See the precision of Scripture, how it not only taught us the year of the deluge but also made clear the month and the day. Then, so as to bring succeeding generations to a better frame of mind through this narrative and augment their fear at what had happened, it says, "On that day all the fountains of the deep burst forth and the sluice gates of heaven broke open; rain fell on the earth for forty days and forty nights."¹⁴ See the extent of the consid-

12. Gen 7:7–9, a strange rehearsal of previous verses that succeeds only in complicating the pictures given already differently by the Yahwist and Priestly editors. Chrysostom, at a loss like others before him, does his own simplifying of the text before omitting all but the last safe clause from comment.

13. Gen 7:10–11.

14. Gen 7:11b–12. Von Rad comments on that awesome v. 11b: "Here we have the same realistic and cosmological ideas as in Gen. ch. 1. According to the Priestly representation we must understand the Flood, therefore, as a catastrophe involving the entire cosmos . . ." (*Genesis*, 128).

erateness Sacred Scripture employs here too, describing everything in a human manner: it is not that there are sluice gates in heaven, but rather that it describes everything in terms customary with us, as if to say that the Lord simply gave a direction and immediately the waters obeyed their Creator's command, fell out of the heavens on all sides and inundated the whole world.

(11) The fact, too, that he brought on the deluge for forty days and nights is a further wonderful sign of his loving kindness: his purpose in his great goodness was that at least some of them might come to their senses and escape that utter ruin, having before their eyes the annihilation of their peers and the destruction about to overwhelm them. I mean, the likelihood is that on the first day some proportion of them were drowned, an additional number on the second day, and likewise on the third day and so on. His reason for extending it for forty days was that he might remove from them any grounds for excuse. You see, had it been his wish and command, he could have submerged everything in one down-pour; instead, out of fidelity to his characteristic love he arranged for a stay of so many days.

(12) Then it says, "On this day Noe boarded the ark, with Shem, Cham and Japheth, with Noe's wife, [223] the three wives of his sons, and all the animals, species by species, as the Lord God had instructed Noe."¹⁵ When the beginning of the deluge occurred, it says, according to the Lord's direction, Noe boarded the ark with his sons, his wife, his sons' wives, and all the animals species by species. The text goes on, "The Lord God shut the ark from the outside."¹⁶ Notice in this place too the considerateness in the expression "God shut the ark from the outside," to teach us that he had ensured the good man's complete safety. The reason for adding "from the

15. Gen 7.13-16, with omissions.

16. Gen 7.16, where again the anthropomorphic quality of the narrative forces Chrysostom to invoke the principle of *synkatabasis*. As Von Rad says, "That Yahweh himself shut up the ark behind Noah is again one of those surprising statements of the Yahwist, almost hybrid in its combination of near-childlike simplicity and theological profundity" (*Genesis*, 120).

outside" to "he shut" was that the good man might not be in the position of seeing the disaster occur and suffering even greater distress. I mean, if he brooded over that terrible flood and set indelibly in his mind the destruction of the human race, the complete annihilation of all brute beasts, and the disappearance, as it were, of people, animals and the earth itself, he would have been disturbed and upset. You see, even if it is the wicked who perish, nevertheless the souls of good people are likely to show compassion when they see people being punished; and you will find each of the good people and the inspired writers making earnest supplication for them, as for example the patriarch did for the Sodomites,¹⁷ and the inspired writers all continued to do. One, for instance, said, "Woe is me, Lord; are you wiping out the remnant of Israel?"¹⁸ while another said, "Will you make people like the fish of the sea, deprived of a leader?"¹⁹ So since without even this the good man was troubled in mind and sick at heart, the Lord, in case the sight of these things should cast Noe into deeper depression, locked him in the ark as though in a prison, lest he have a sight of these events and be terror-struck. In his care for him, therefore, the loving God does not allow him to view the torrent of water nor see the disaster occurring that involved the destruction of the world.

(13) Whenever, on the other hand, I ponder this just man's existence in the ark, I am struck with amazement, and once more attribute it all to God's loving kindness: unless that had strengthened his resolve and had rendered difficult things easy, how would he have been able, tell me, to bear being locked in there like that as though in some dungeon or prison? How could he, tell me, have put up with the awful crashing of the waves? After all, if people who find themselves on board ship driven by sail, watching the pilot seated at the rudder and pitting his own skill against the force of the winds, fear for their very salvation, so to say, and die of fright at the ferocity of the waves, what could you say about this just

17. Gen 18.22-23.

18. Ezek 9.8.

19. Hab 1.14.

man? I mean, finding himself on the ark as though in prison, as I was just saying, he gazed hither and yon, unable to see the sky and having nowhere to direct his eyes, forced to remain inside, with nothing at all to look at that could afford him any comfort.

(14) You see, in the case of people sailing the sea it is possible, even when the billows rise on high, to gain some little comfort by gazing time and again at the sky, descriing a mountain top, and catching sight of a large city; [224] and even if the storm increased in intensity and becomes unbearable for ten days or somewhat longer, yet despite all those storms and those perils, once they are cast up on the shore and get their breath back a little they lose all recollection of those hardships. In the present case, however, it was nothing like that; instead, for a whole year²⁰ he dwelt in the strange and unusual prison without even being able to breathe the fresh air—how could he, after all, with the ark closed in on all sides? How did he put up with it? How did he last? I mean, even if their bodies had been made of iron and steel, how could they have survived without fresh air, without the breeze, which no less than fresh air exists to invigorate our bodies, without being able to feast their eyes on a glimpse of the sky or the range of colored flowers growing on land? In fact, how did they not lose the sight of their eyes after living in this fashion for so long? And if we were interested in pursuing the matter at the level of human reasoning, we would feel it necessary to consider where they got their supply of drinking water from while living on board the ark. Leaving that aside, how did this good man with his sons and their wives manage to abide living with animals and brute beasts and all the rest? How did he put up with the stench? How did he bear living with them? And why mention that point? How did the brute beasts themselves manage to cope with it without perishing in such a long period of time without being free to enjoy fresh air or move about, but confined in one space? I mean, you know quite well that, as far as our nature

20. A little pardonable exaggeration on Chrysostom's part?

goes as also the nature of the beasts, even if we have the benefit of fresh air and all other things but are confined to one place continuously, there is no way of avoiding our death and demise. How then could this good person last out so long with all these creatures in the ark? In no other way than by the grace from above that makes all things possible. I mean, was it not due to grace from above that the ark was tossed this way and that without being submerged in such a force of water, with no steersman at the helm? You can't say that it was designed like a ship so as to be able to steer a course by some kind of know-how. The ark was shut in on all sides; and by direction of the Creator not only did the force of the water cause it no harm but it rose to the top and guaranteed the safety of its passengers.

(15) So, whenever God does something, dearly beloved, don't insist on inquiring with your human reasoning into whatever he has done: it surpasses our understanding, and the human mind could not succeed in measuring up to it or grasping the secret of what has been created by him. Hence, after hearing that God has so directed, we ought believe and obey what is said by him. After all, being Creator of our nature he transforms and reshapes everything according to his own decision. "The Lord God shut the ark from outside." Great was this just man's virtue and the depth of his faith. Faith, you see, was responsible for the building of the ark, for his putting up with his quarters without resentment, tolerating the hardships of existence with animals and all the wild beasts. On this account blessed Paul called him to mind and to celebrate his virtues shouted aloud, "By faith Noe, forewarned as he was about things not yet seen kept his own counsel as he prepared the ark with a view to saving his own household; by faith he condemned the [225] world, and succeeded to a share of that righteousness that accords with faith."²¹ Do you see how faith in God like a safe anchor enabled him to see to the building of the ark and to put up with his quarters? Faith it was, you see, that proved the basis of

21. Heb 11.7.

his salvation; "through it," the text says, "he condemned the world, and succeeded to a share of that goodness that accords with faith." Not that he did the condemning but that the Lord declares the condemnation by comparison; that is to say, those who enjoyed the same advantages as the good man did not share with him the same path of virtue. So it was through the faith that he exemplified that he condemned those who exemplified lack of faith, failing to believe the forewarning.

(16) On the other hand, along with everybody else, I too am amazed at the just man's virtue, and the Lord's goodness and love beyond all telling when I think of how he managed to live among the wild animals, namely, lions, panthers, bears and the other fierce and untamed animals. Call to mind in this connection, I ask you, dearly beloved, the esteem enjoyed by the firstformed human being before the Fall, and consider God's goodness: after his transgression undermined the authority given him, the good Lord by contrast found another man capable of correcting that original image by preserving the imprint of virtue and demonstrating strict obedience to law. So he placed him once more in his pristine position of esteem, as if to teach us through this procedure the extent of the authority Adam had before the Fall. Accordingly the good man's virtue profited from God's loving kindness to restore the former control, and once more the wild animals recognized their subordination. In other words, whenever the animals saw the good man, they lost all thought of their own nature—or, rather, not their nature but their ferocity, and changed to docility the ferocity innate in their nature. Notice this happening in the case of Daniel: encircled by the lions, as though by sheep, he passed his time that way without fear, the good man's trust restraining the wild beasts' nature and not allowing them to demonstrate the characteristics of wild animals.²² Well, in just the same manner this remarkable man bore his existence with the wild animals with equanimity, and neither the straitened circumstances, nor the protracted length of time, nor being locked in, nor lack of fresh air to breathe

22. A little gloss on Dan 6.22.

caused him to become jaded; instead, through his faith in God everything seemed easy, and thus he lived in that terrible prison as we would in meadows and leafy glades.

(17) In other words, the Lord's command made the difficult things seem simple to him. Such, after all, is the way with good people: when they endure something for his sake, far from attending to the appearance of what occurs, they understand the reason behind it and thus bear everything with equanimity. Likewise by Paul, the teacher of the gentiles, imprisonment, arraignment, daily peril, all those many unbearable hardships were called light, not because they really were so by nature, but because the reason behind their happening produced such an attitude in him that he would not turn back in the face of these oncoming threats. Listen, after all, to what he says: "For the light weight of our passing distress produces in us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison;"²³ expectation of the glory we are destined to attain, he is saying, and of that unceasing enjoyment [226] makes us bear without difficulty these hardships one after another and consider them of no consequence. Do you see how love of God reduces the intensity of troubles and prevents our having any sense of them as they befall us? On this account, of course, this blessed man, too, bore everything with equanimity, sustained by faith and hope in God.

(18) "The Lord God shut the ark from outside," the text says. "The deluge fell forty days and forty nights upon the earth, and the ark began to float."²⁴ Notice once more how he increases our awe through his way of narrating and embroiders the event. "The deluge fell forty days and forty nights," the text says, "the flood deepened and picked up the ark, so that it was lifted above the earth. The force of the water grew stronger and it spread widely on the earth, and the ark was carried above the flood level. The water continued to spread further and further on the land."²⁵ See how precisely it describes to us the great force of the waters, and

23. 2 Cor 4.17.

24. A précis of Gen 7.17.

25. Gen 7.17-19, where the LXX adds "forty nights" to the Hebrew, probably under the influence of v. 12.

the fact that each day the flood increased in extent. "The water continued to spread further and further," the text says, "and covered the highest mountains under heaven. The water rose fifteen cubits, and submerged all the mountains."²⁶ It was appropriate that the loving Lord arranged for the ark to be shut so that the just man did not see what happened. I mean, if we after so many years and so many generations are aghast simply at hearing Scripture's account of it and are reduced to trembling, how likely it was that that just man would be stricken to see with his own eyes that mighty deep that no one could survive? How, in fact, could he have managed to cope with the vision even for a short time? Would he not, on the contrary, have immediately fainted at his first glimpse as his soul left him, unable to bear any further sight of such an awesome spectacle? I mean, consider, I ask you, dearly beloved, how in our life whenever some little shower falls we go to pieces, worry about all our concerns, even despair of life itself, so to say. So how likely was it that that just man in those circumstances should be distressed to see the flood swelling to such heights? "The flood rose fifteen cubits above the mountains,"²⁷ the text says, after all.

(19) On this point, I ask you, dearly beloved, recall what was spoken by the Lord when he said, "'My spirit is not to remain with these human beings on account of their being carnal,'"²⁸ and again, "The earth was corrupt, and was filled with lawlessness,"²⁹ and "The Lord saw that the earth was utterly corrupt because all flesh had corrupted their ways upon earth."³⁰ Accordingly, the world needed a complete cleansing; every stain had to be expunged from it, all leaven of the previous wickedness had to be sifted out and no trace of evil left; instead, a certain renovation had to be effected, like some skilled craftsman taking a vase that had aged with time and rusted away, so to say, and putting it into the kiln to ensure the removal of all the rust, thus reshaping and refash-

26. Gen 7.19-20.

27. Chrysostom himself embroidering the text of v. 20 for effect.

28. Gen 6.3.

29. Gen 6.11.

30. Gen 6.12.

ioning it and returning it to its pristine form. In the same way our Lord too cleansed the whole world by the deluge and, so to say, freed human beings from their wickedness, their defilement and all their corruption, leaving the world more resplendent and once more revealing the brightness of its countenance, and not permitting even a trace of the previous ugliness to persist. "The flood rose fifteen cubits above the mountains," says the text.

(20) It is not without purpose that Scripture describes all this to us; instead, its purpose is for us to learn that not only people, cattle, fourfooted beasts and reptiles were drowned but also the birds [227] of heaven and whatever inhabited the mountains, namely, animals and other wild creatures. Hence the text says, "The flood rose fifteen cubits above the mountains," for you to learn that the execution of the Lord's sentence had been effected; he said, remember, "'After seven more days I will bring a deluge upon the earth and I will wipe off the face of the earth all the life I have made, from human beings to cattle, and from reptiles to birds of heaven.'" ³¹ So, Sacred Scripture narrates this, not simply to teach us the flood level, but that we may be able to understand along with this that there was absolutely nothing left standing—no wild beasts, no animals, no cattle; rather, everything was annihilated along with the human race. Since it was for their sake that all these creatures had been created, with the imminent destruction of the human being it was fitting that these creatures, too, should meet their end. Then, after teaching us the great height reached by the flood waters and the fact that they rose a further fifteen cubits above the mountain peaks, it further adds out of fidelity to its characteristic precision, "There perished all flesh that moved on the earth—birds, animals, every reptile that moved on the earth, every human being—everything that had breath of life, everything on dry land: all perished." ³² That wasn't an idle reference in the words, "everything on dry land;" instead, its pur-

31. Gen 7.4 in a version only roughly approximating to the LXX text Chrysostom quoted in the previous homily.

32. Gen 6.21–22.

pose was to teach us that while all others perished, the just man with everyone in the ark alone were saved. You see, in God's design they had previously moved from the dry land and boarded the ark. "All life that was on the face of the earth was wiped out, from human beings to cattle, reptiles, birds of heaven—they were wiped off the earth."³³ See how once, twice and more frequently it teaches us the occurrence of the disaster and the fact that no creatures escaped but rather all were drowned in the flood, both the human race and the animal kingdom.

(21) "Noe alone survived," the text says, "and those with him in the ark. The water was at flood level on the earth for a hundred and fifty days."³⁴ For all those days, the text says, the water remained at flood level. Consider here again, I ask you, the just man's greatness of soul and the extraordinary degree of his fortitude. What sufferings would he not have endured in having engraved on his mind and having seen with the eyes of his intellect, as it were, the bodies of human beings, of cattle clean and unclean, all alike undergoing death, mingled together without any distinction being made? Further, in addition to this, he pondered within himself the loneliness, the isolation, that distressing existence, with no consolation coming from any quarter, neither from converse, nor from pleasant prospects, nor from knowing with precision how long he was destined to put up with existence in that terrible prison. After all, as long as there was the crashing and booming of the waves, fear was daily sent surging through him. I mean, what likelihood was there that he would suspect any good news when he had before his eyes for a hundred and fifty days the water continuing at such a height, reaching flood level without subsiding in the slightest? Still, he took it all in good part, knowing the Lord's inventiveness and the fact that being Lord of all life he does everything and changes what he wants to, so he bore no resentment against life in those circumstances. You see, God's grace came to lend heart [228] to his enthusiasm and provided him

33. Gen 6.23.

34. Gen 6.23-24.

with sufficient comfort, not allowing him to fall victim to brooding nor dwell on ignoble or unmanly alternatives. In other words, since previously he had made the most of his own resources—his painstaking virtue, his scrupulous sense of goodness, the extraordinary degree of his faith—he was now regaled with the Lord's blessings in abundance: forbearance, fortitude, the ability to bear everything without resentment, putting up with life in the ark, sustaining no harm from the experience, not perishing or being distressed by existence in the company of wild animals.

(22) Let us likewise, therefore, I beseech you, imitate this just man and exert ourselves to bring to bear our resources with a view to making ourselves worthy of the gifts coming from God. This, you see, is the reason he waits for occasions we provide, that he may display great generosity. So, do not let us deprive ourselves of his gifts through indifference; rather, let us make every effort and press forward to take the initiative and follow the way leading to virtue so as to enjoy support from above and be able to attain the goal. You see, it is impossible for us to achieve any good deed without being in receipt of grace from above. Clinging, therefore, to hope in God as though to a firm, secure anchor, let us not have regard for the difficulty of virtue but consider instead the reward following the difficulty and thus meet every challenge easily. Likewise, when a merchant moves out of port and sails on the high seas, it is not only pirates that are on his mind, or shipwreck, or leviathans, or the onset of storms, or continuous tempests, or unforeseen troubles, but also the profits coming his way in the wake of these hazards: nourished by this hope he accepts with equanimity the hardships that beset him so as to gain greater rewards and thus make for his home port. The farmer, too, does not think only of the hardships associated with farming, downpours, bad luck with the soil, a rust plague, a scourge of locusts; instead, he concentrates his thinking on the threshing floor and the sheafs, and so puts up with everything placidly, feeling no effect of the hardships because of his expectation of the yield: even if his hope is uncertain, yet he is nourished by stronger hopes and does not

give up in the face of hardships but brings all his resources to bear, waiting to gather the reward of his labors. The soldier, too, in turn arms himself and goes into battle thinking not only of wounds and casualties, enemy raids and other problems, but imagining victory and trophies coming his way; thus he equips himself with a panoply of weapons, and despite the great uncertainty and hazard, he banishes all such thoughts from his mind, sets glowing prospects before him, banishes all sluggishness, takes up his arms and advances in formation against the foe.

(23) If therefore, dearly beloved, merchants, farmers and soldiers on the basis of uncertain hope face numerous hazards and difficulties many and varied, as you heard, and yet none of them despair in the face of hardship nor shrink back from brighter prospects, what excuse would we be found worthy of if we desisted from virtue and did not willingly accept every hardship despite the fact of an assured hope and so many good things laid up for us and a superabundant reward for all our achievements? So listen to blessed Paul's remarks after so many dreadful tribulations, arraignments, imprisonment and [229] daily dying: "The sufferings of this present life are not worth comparing to the glory due to be revealed in our regard."³⁵ even if each day (he is saying) we suffer death, something that nature could not endure, even if mind overcomes matter to gain the prize through the Lord's loving kindness, we endure nothing comparable to the good things we are destined to receive (he is saying) or the glory due to be revealed in our regard. See how great the glory is which they enjoy who practice virtue, to the extent that it surpasses anything you could exemplify: were you to ascend to the very summit, you would still fall short. I mean, what could a human being give evidence of to such an extent as to rival adequately the Lord's generosity? If a man of Paul's quality and stature said, "The sufferings of this present life are not worth comparing to the glory due to be revealed in our regard," if he said, "I die daily,"³⁶ and again, "I worked harder than all

35. Rom 8.18.

36. 1 Cor 15.31.

of them,"³⁷ what would we say after being unwilling to put up with incidental hardship for the sake of virtue, and always looking instead for enjoyment and taking care to avoid experiencing distress, even though we know that it is impossible that enjoyment in the next life would come our way otherwise than here in this life showing our desire for it by exerting ourselves? These hardships, you see, are the means of winning God's favor for us, and a little struggle here brings us there great confidence, provided only we are ready to proceed in line with the advice of Paul, the world's teacher.

(24) Consider, dearly beloved, that life's troubles, even if distressing, are still of short duration, whereas the good things that will come to us in the next life are eternal and everlasting. "What we see is passing," Scripture says, "but what is not seen is everlasting."³⁸ Accordingly, let us endure what is passing without complaint and not desist from virtue's struggle so that we may enjoy the good things that are eternal and last forever. May it be the good fortune of all of us to enjoy them, thanks to the grace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, power and honor, now and forever, for ages of ages. Amen.

37. 1 Cor 15.10.

38. 2 Cor 4.18.

HOMILY 26

"And God was mindful of Noe and of all the beasts, all the cattle, all the birds and all the reptiles that were with him in the ark. And God sent a wind upon the earth, and the water subsided."¹



REAT [229] AND INDESCRIBABLE beyond all telling is the loving kindness of God revealed in the verses read just now, along with the extraordinary degree of his goodness, which he manifests not only in regard to this rational being—namely, the human being—but also in regard to the species of irrational beings. I mean, being in fact Creator of them all he extends his characteristic goodness to everything created by him, showing us through everything how much care he takes of the human race and the fact that he undertook everything from the beginning and the very outset for our salvation. Accordingly, even if he chastises and punishes, he does both from his very goodness. You see, far from inflicting punishment in rage and anger, it is his wish to put a stop to evil lest it get entirely out of hand. In the present case also, as you have heard, he had no other motive in bringing on the deluge than his concern for the people who had abandoned themselves to such terrible wickedness.

(2) What kind of concern is that, someone will say, that annihilates everyone under the waters? Don't speak rashly, o man [230]; instead, accept with grateful mind what is done by the Lord, and realize in that instance how much concern is evidenced by that happening in particular. I mean, to separate from their wickedness people who have sinned irreparably, who have daily aggravated their wounds and rendered their ulcers incurable—isn't that a mark of the greatest con-

1. Gen 8.1, the LXX elaborating the point with the inclusion of birds and reptiles as well.

cern? Isn't the very recourse to punishment replete with loving kindness? After all, for people who in any case are due to discharge the debt of nature to lay aside their life in this fashion painlessly by way of punishment and feel no effect of the events—isn't this a mark of great wisdom and goodness? Further, if anyone were to learn through reverential consideration what in fact happened, that not only did God treat the punished with kindness but that those destined to follow them would reap from it two particular benefits—namely, not being ensnared in the same troubles, and being rendered wiser by these events—how much thanks ought they pay to God for this grace of being brought to their senses afterwards both through the others' punishment and by the fear of suffering the same chastisement, as well as by the removal of the leaven of all wickedness and evil and the survival of no one to instruct them in evil and wickedness? Do you see how his punishments and chastisements are rather kindnesses, and demonstrate in particular his concern for the human race?

(3) If anyone were interested in enumerating them from the very outset, he would find God inflicting punishments in every instance with this very same purpose. Even in the case of Adam, when he fell, he did not simply punish him but out of kindness drove him from the garden. What sort of kindness was that, some one will say, to be expelled from life in the garden? Don't simply pay attention to the events, dearly beloved, nor take a casual interest in what is done by God; instead, gain an insight into the depths of his goodness and you will find it is this that has motivated him in all his doings. I mean, tell me, if even after the Fall Adam had continued to enjoy the same privileges, to what depths would he not have descended? After all, if he fell a victim to the serpent's deceit so as to heed all his lavish promises and accept the advice the devil offered him to make them vain and lead them to hope for equality with God, drawing them into the sin of disobedience; and if despite that he had continued in the same position of esteem and the same lifestyle, how could he have failed to consider the wicked demon more trustworthy than the Creator of all, and have formed extravagant ideas of his

own importance? This, you see, is what human beings are like: when their sin leads them to get the bit between their teeth and feel no fear, they go ahead and fall headlong over the precipice. There are other ways as well, however, by which I can show that it was an example of his loving kindness that God directed him to leave the garden and rendered him liable to the punishment of death, bringing him to his senses and making him more careful in future both by the expulsion and by locating him nearby, and teaching him through these events the deceiver's duplicity. Now the punishment of death he likewise inflicted with this end in view, that in future he might not through disobedience become addicted to sin and commit sins that did not end with death. So does all this not strike you as a mark of the greatest love, both the expulsion from the garden and the imposition of the punishment of death?

(4) I have other means, however, of improving on this explanation. What, precisely? The fact that in venting his anger against him in this way he was not simply investing him with acts of kindness but also intending to bring future generations to a better frame of mind through what was done to him. You see, even if after these events [231] his son (I mean Cain) saw with his own eyes the expulsion of his father from the garden, his fall from that ineffable glory, the magnitude of that curse in the words, "'Dust you are and to dust you are to return,'"² and yet did not come to his senses through this but even involved himself in worse evils; if he had not seen what happened to his father, to what depth of folly would he not have plunged? The remarkable thing surely is that in punishing the very person who had committed such terrible sins and besmirched his right hand in execrable slaughter, God tempered the punishment with loving kindness. To learn the magnitude of God's goodness from what happened to Cain: when he insulted God and displayed great disregard for him by intending to make an offering without properly choosing but making his approach casually and as

if by chance, God said nothing harsh or severe to him; the sin, at any rate, far from being casual, was extremely heinous. You see, if people wish to show regard for their peers, human beings though they are, by offering them the foremost and most select gifts and are concerned to present them with things that seem to them the most precious of all, how is it that Cain, human being that he was, did not feel it necessary in his offering to God to offer him the most precious and most select gifts? Accordingly, even though he was committing such a grave sin and displaying such extreme disregard, God did not exact vengeance nor did he inflict punishment for what was done; instead, like one friend conversing with another in all gentleness, he thus addressed these words to him, "‘Though you have sinned, be at peace.’"³ He only showed him his sin and urged him not to go any further. Since, however, that unfortunate man not only gained nothing from such wonderful forbearance but even added worse crimes to the previous ones and rushed headlong to the slaughter of his brother, God was thus showing extreme long-suffering in his regard by first questioning him and giving him the opportunity for explanation; but as he persisted in his shamelessness, then for the sake of bringing him to his senses God inflicted the punishment that had mingled with it great love on his part.

(5) Do you see how, while in the one case he made allowance for Cain when he sinned against him, even though the sin was not casual, in the other case when he raised his hand against his brother he then applied the punishment and the curse. This is what we too should do in our life, in imitation of our Lord: we should discount sins committed against us and make allowance for those who offend us, whereas when someone makes God the object of attack, then we should invoke punishment. Instead—how, I know not—we do everything in the contrary manner: sins affecting God we are not at all concerned to punish, whereas if some chance offense is committed against us, we turn exacting avengers and prose-

3. Gen 4:7.

cutors of that, unaware that by so doing we rather provoke the loving Lord the more so against ourselves. You see, for proof that it is customary with God to make allowance frequently for sins committed against himself but to punish with exceeding severity those sins we commit against our neighbor, listen to the words of blessed Paul: "If someone has a non-believing wife, and she is happy to be living with him, let him not set her aside. And if a woman has a non-believing husband, and he is happy to be living with her, let her not set him aside."⁴ Do you see the extent of the considerateness? Even if he is a pagan, even if he is a non-believer, yet accepts the marital situation, she is not to reject him. Further, "Even if your wife happens to be a pagan, even if she is a non-believer and yet wants to live with you, [232] don't drive her off. After all," he says, "how do you know, woman, if you will save your husband, and how do you know, husband, if you will save your wife?"⁵ See how there is no problem about a person's accepting an unbelieving husband or wife in a marital partnership. Listen further, however, to Christ's words to his disciples: "I say to you that everyone who puts aside his wife except on the score of infidelity causes her to commit adultery."⁶ What an extraordinary degree of loving kindness! Even if the wife is a non-believer, he is saying, or a pagan, yet accepts the marital situation, accept her; but if she sins against you and forgets her marriage vows and prefers association with others, you may send her away and reject her.

(6) So with these thoughts in mind let us for our part make a return to the Lord for his favor to us, and as he is prepared to make allowances for offenses against him while exacting vengeance for those against us, and with great severity, in just the same way let us, too, behave; let us pass over what offenses our neighbor commits against us, but what he directs

4. 1 Cor 7.12-13.

5. 1 Cor 7.16, with an introduction of Chrysostom's own, perhaps in place of v. 15 stating the 'Pauline privilege,' without which v. 16 fails to have the force intended by Paul. Yet Chrysostom then goes on to quote Christ in support of that dispensation, somewhat against the sense of the gospel passage.

6. Matt 5.32.

against God let us take great pains to exact vengeance for. This, after all, will bring us, too, the greatest benefit, and will be of no little help to those undergoing correction.

(7) Perhaps our introduction today had been extended to great length. What is to become of me? It wasn't deliberately that I went to this extreme; I was carried away with the flow of the sermon. Since, however, all our talk has been concerned with the deluge, we needed to show your good selves that even the punishments sent by God are rather acts of loving kindness than punishments, and so too therefore was the deluge. I mean, like a kind father he arranges everything in his care for our kind. But for you to learn both from what has now been proposed to you and from what was read today the magnitude of his loving kindness, listen to the very words of the Holy Scriptures: after blessed Moses taught us yesterday in these words, that "the water was at flood level on the earth for a hundred and fifty days"⁷ (that being the point, remember, our instruction had reached), he says today, "God was mindful of Noe, and of all the wild animals, all the cattle, all the birds and all the reptiles that were with him in the ark."⁸

(8) Notice once again, I ask you, the considerateness of Sacred Scripture: "God was mindful," it says. Let us take what is said, dearly beloved, in a sense befitting God, and not interpret the concreteness of the expressions from the viewpoint of the limitations of our human condition. I mean, as far as that ineffable essence is concerned, the word is improper; but as far as our limitations are concerned, the expression is made appropriately. "God was mindful of Noe," the text says. You see, since it had narrated to us in what was said already, as we taught your good selves previously, that the rain fell for forty days and forty nights, and for a hundred and fifty days it remained at the same level reaching fifteen cubits above the mountains, and that while this was happening, the just man happened to be in the ark, unable even to enjoy a breath of fresh air, with all the brute beasts living with

7. Gen 7.24.

8. Gen 8.1.

him, consequently it says, "God was mindful of Noe." What is the meaning of "mindful"? It means God took pity on the just man living in the ark, had mercy on him for the straitened conditions in which he found himself, reduced as he was to such helplessness and uncertain as to what extreme his difficulties would extend. I mean, consider, I ask you, what thoughts he was entertaining after [233] the forty days and forty nights during which the flood of water poured down, seeing as he did the waters remaining at the same level for a hundred and fifty days and not subsiding in the slightest; what was even more distressing, the fact that he was unable to see what was happening with his own eyes, since he was shut in, and because unable to gauge with his eyesight the extent of the disaster he suffered the greater distress and imagined worse things each day. I for my part, however, am amazed how he wasn't overwhelmed by coming to a realization of the destruction of the human race, his own isolation and that difficult style of existence. Still, the cause of all these advantages he enjoyed was his faith in God, through which he kept up his spirits and bore everything without resentment, so that he was nourished by hope and felt no effect of these troubles.

(9) So, since he had made whatever effort he was capable of, had given evidence of endurance, and brought his faith to bear in generous measure in displaying great bravery, notice the good God's great love for him. "God was mindful of Noe," the text says. It did not simply say, "He was mindful;" instead, since Sacred Scripture had previously made clear to us the testimony to the just man paid by God in the words, "Board the ark, because I have found you to be law-abiding by comparison with your contemporaries,"⁹ consequently it now says, "God was mindful of Noe." That is to say, he remembered the testimony he had paid him and did not long neglect the just man; rather, he showed his longsuffering as long as Noe could bear, and then regaled him with favor from himself. You see, he knows the limitations of our nature, and

9. Gen 7.1.

when he lets us endure some trial, he allows it to continue for as long as he knows we can endure it so that he may also grant us reward commensurate with our fortitude and give evidence of his characteristic love, as Paul too says, "God, however, is faithful in not allowing you to be tested beyond your capabilities but in providing also with the trial a way out of it so that you can endure it."¹⁰ Since therefore this just man too displayed fortitude and endurance, putting up with confinement in the ark through faith in God, "God was mindful of Noe," the text says. Then, as index of the depths of his loving kindness Sacred Scripture added, "and of all the wild beasts, all the cattle, all the birds and all the reptiles that were with him in the ark."

(10) See how he did everything out of his esteem for the human being: as in the case of the destruction of human beings in the flood he destroyed also along with them the whole range of brute beasts, so in this case too, when he intends to show his characteristic love for the good man out of his regard for him, he extends his goodness to the animal kingdom as well, the wild beasts, the birds and the reptiles. "God was mindful of Noe," the text says, "and of all the wild beasts, all the cattle and all the reptiles that were with him in the ark. God sent a wind upon the earth, and the water subsided." Being mindful of Noe, the text says, and of those with him in the ark, he directed the flood of water to halt so that little by little he might show his characteristic love and now give the good man a breath of fresh air, free him from the turmoil of his thoughts and restore him to a state of tranquility by granting him the enjoyment of daylight and a breath of fresh air. "God sent [234] a wind upon the earth, and the water subsided. The torrents of the depths and the sluice gates of heaven were shut off."¹¹

(11) See how it narrates everything to us in human fashion: "The fountains of the deep and the sluice gates of heaven were shut off," the text says, "and the rain from heaven stopped," as if to say that the Lord decided and once again

10. 1 Cor 10.13.

11. Gen 8.2.

the waters kept to their own limits, there was no further flooding, and instead they gradually subsided. "The water gave way and flowed off the earth; the water diminished after a hundred and fifty days."¹² What reasoning could ever manage to grasp that? Let it be (God says); the rain stopped, the fountains no longer yielded a flood, and the sluice gates of heaven were shut—how did all this great amount of water subside? Mighty depths were everywhere—so how could this huge flood of water suddenly become less? Who could ever manage to solve this by human reasoning? So what can you say? It was God's direction that achieved it all. Accordingly, let us not pry into the secret; let us simply take it on faith that he gave the command and the depths became shallow, he issued his direction and once again they checked their onset and respected their own limits which the Lord alone knew. "On the twenty seventh day of the seventh month the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. The water continued to diminish until the tenth month; on the first day of the tenth month the mountain peaks became visible."¹³ Notice how suddenly the change took place and how far the waters subsided so that the ark could come to rest on the mountains. Previously, you remember, Scripture had said that the water level reached fifteen cubits above the mountains, whereas now it says that the ark came to rest upon Mount Ararat, and then the water gradually diminished until the tenth month, and then in the tenth month the mountain peaks became visible.

(12) Consider, I ask you, the just man's equanimity, how he managed to keep his head for so many months, shut in though he was as if in complete darkness. "After the forty days," the text goes on, "Noe opened the window in the ark he had made and sent out the raven to see if the water had

12. Gen 8.3. Despite his insistence on *akribeia*, Chrysostom does not risk entering into discussion of the divergent statements of the duration of the Flood—being unable, of course, to envisage diversity of sources in one narrative.

13. Gen 8.4–5; not unexpectedly in this composite narrative, discrepancies emerge in the texts of Chrysostom, other LXX and Hebrew MSS in the time references, here and elsewhere.

subsided.”¹⁴ See the good man not yet daring to see for himself; instead, he sent out the raven with the intention of finding out through it whether some encouraging transformation could be expected. “It flew off,” the text goes on, “but did not come back before the water was dried up from the earth.”¹⁵ Sacred Scripture added the word “before,” not because it did come back later, but because this is a peculiarity of Sacred Scripture. You would often come across this feature, and we could locate many such examples and bring them to your attention; lest, however, you learn everything from us and become slack in your interest, we will leave it to you to study Scripture and discover where it employs these peculiar usages. But for the present we need to explain the reason why the bird didn’t come back. Perhaps, with the waters subsiding, the bird, being unclean, happened upon corpses of men and beasts and, finding nourishment to its liking, stayed there—something that proved to be no little sign of hope and encouragement for the just man. I mean, if that weren’t the case and he didn’t gain any comfort, it would have come back.

(13) For proof of this, at this point the just man, with expectation enkindled, next sends out the dove, a tame yet friendly bird characterized by great gentleness, with no other diet than seeds, [235] being numbered as it is among the clean birds. “He sent out the dove from him,” the text says, “to see if the water had subsided from the face of the earth. The dove found no rest for its feet and came back to him in the ark, because water covered the whole face of the earth.”¹⁶ It is worth examining at this point how previously Sacred Scripture said that the mountain peaks had become visible, but now says that the dove found nowhere to rest and came back to him in the ark, because water covered the whole face of the earth. Let us read the verse with precision, and we will know the reason. It did not simply say, remember, “It found no rest,” but added, “for its feet,” to teach us that even if the

14. Gen 8.6–7.

15. Gen 8.7b. The LXX differs from the Hebrew of v. 7.

16. Gen 8.8–9.

water had partly subsided and the mountain peaks had become visible, still from the abundance of water even the very mountain peaks were muddy or were covered with a muddy slime. Hence the dove was neither able to perch anywhere nor successful in finding food to its liking, so it turned back, teaching the just man by its return that there was still a great flood. "Stretching out his hand," the text goes on, "he grasped it and pulled it in to him in the ark." Do you see the extent of the bird's gentleness, how it returned and by its coming taught the just man to display still some little patience? Hence, the text goes on, "he contained himself for seven days more before sending out the dove from the ark: the dove came back to him towards evening carrying a dry olive twig in its mouth."¹⁷ It is not idly or to no purpose that the phrase "towards evening" occurs here; instead, it is for us to learn that the bird, that had been feeding all day and had found some suitable food, came back in the evening carrying a dry olive twig in its mouth. That is the kind of creature it is, you see, tame and always looking for company—hence, of course, it turned back and by means of the dry olive twig brought the just man great consolation.

(14) But perhaps someone might say: where did it find the olive twig? While the whole incident happened through God's design, both its discovery and the dove's taking it in its mouth and going back again to the just man, yet in this particular case as well that tree is evergreen and it is likely that with the subsidence of the waters the tree still had the foliage on its branches. "He contained himself," the text says, "a further seven days before sending out the dove, which did not proceed to return to him again."¹⁸ See the just man through every event receiving sufficient encouragement; just as he had sound hopes at the bird's return, bringing the olive twig in its mouth, so now too its departure to return no more pro-

17. Gen 8.10–11a.

18. Gen 8.12, in the LXX's literal rendering of the Hebrew idiom (cf. 4.2). It is noteworthy that Chrysostom has thus omitted v. 11b of the LXX and Hebrew, "Noe knew that the water had subsided from the earth," perhaps to avoid a suggestion of superfluity in v. 12.

vided him with a forceful proof of its finding great satisfaction and of the complete subsidence of the waters.

(15) The text goes on, "In the first month of the six hundred and first year of Noe's life the water left the face of the earth. Noe opened the roof of the ark he had made and saw that the water had left the face of the earth."¹⁹ Here once again I am forced to marvel and be amazed at the just man's virtue and God's loving kindness; how could it be, tell me, that in exposing himself to the fresh air and raising his eyes to the sight of heaven he was not blinded and did not lose the sight of his eyes? You are well aware, of course, that this is a particularly common affliction [236] with people who live in dark and gloomy places, if only for a short time in the day, and suddenly decide to look up at the source of light. This just man, on the contrary, lived in the ark as if in complete darkness for an entire year and so many months, and now suddenly looked at the source of light without suffering any such affliction. God's love, you see, came with the endurance granted him, also supplying strength to the body's senses and making them superior to bodily needs. "By the twenty seventh day of the tenth month the land had dried."²⁰ It is not idly that Sacred Scripture shows such precision: it is for us to learn that by the stage of one day of that year when the just man's endurance was demonstrated the purpose had been fulfilled and the purification of the whole world had been achieved.

(16) Then, when all creation was cleansed as if of some blemish, removing all defilement caused in it by people's wickedness, and its countenance was made resplendent, then finally he directed the just man to disembark from the ark and freed him from that awful prison in the words, "Then the Lord God said to Noe, 'Disembark, you and your sons, your wife and your sons' wives with you, as well as all flesh, from birds to cattle; take off with you every reptile that crawls upon the earth, and increase and multiply on the earth.'²¹

19. Gen 8.13, with a further instance of disparity in counting.

20. Gen 8.14.

21. Gen 8.15-17.

Notice God's goodness, how in everything he encourages the good man: after ordering him to disembark from the ark along with his sons, his wife, his sons' wives and all the wild animals, then lest great discouragement should gradually overtake him by this further development and he become anxious at the thought that he would be on his own, dwelling alone in such a vast expanse of earth, with no one else existing, God first said, Disembark from the ark, and take off everything with you, and then added, "Increase and multiply on the earth." See how once again this good man receives that former blessing which Adam had received before the Fall: just as he heard when he was created, "God blessed them in the words, 'Increase and multiply, and gain dominion over the earth,'" ²² so too this man now hears the words, "Increase and multiply on the earth." In other words, just as the former man became the beginning and root of all creatures before the deluge, so too this just man becomes a kind of leaven, beginning and root of everything after the deluge. From this point on, what is comprised in the make-up of human beings takes its beginning, and the whole of creation recovers its proper order, both the soil reawakening to productivity as well as everything else that had been created for the service of human beings.

(17) The text goes on, "Noe disembarked along with his wife, his sons and his sons' wives; and all the animals, all the cattle, every species of bird and reptile crawling upon the earth disembarked from the ark." ²³ According to the Lord's direction, the text says, he disembarked from the ark with everything else after receiving the blessing in the words, "Increase and multiply." From then on the just man was living alone in the whole earth along with his wife, his children and their wives. As soon as he disembarks he expresses his own gratitude, and offers thanks to his Lord both for what had happened and for what lay ahead. But if you don't mind, to avoid the risk of lengthening this sermon, let us put off till next time [237] the account of the just man's gratitude and

22. Gen 1.28.

23. Gen 8.18-19.

bring the sermon to a close at this point, exhorting your good selves to keep this just man constantly in mind, get to know precisely the beauty of his virtue and become imitators of him. After all, consider, I ask you, how great was the wealth of his virtue from the fact that now for so many days we have been telling his story without even now being able to bring to a close our treatment of him. Why do I say bring to a close? No matter how much we say, we can never reach an end; rather, even if we could say a great deal, even if those coming after could, we would never be in a position to say the last word—such is the nature of the virtue! You see, provided we are willing, this man will be able to instruct all our fellows and lead us all on to the imitation of virtue. I mean, since this just man, even despite living his life amongst such wicked people and being unable to find any soul-mate, was still found to have attained such an extraordinary measure of virtue, what excuse would there be for us who have had no such obstacles and yet are so indifferent about its practice? In other words, don't quote me only his life for those five hundred years and the fact that he lived as the object of scorn and ridicule by the practitioners of evil, but also his existence in the ark. That year, after all, seems to me equivalent to all the previous time; the just man was obliged to endure such terrible hardship there, finding himself in such straitened circumstances, unable to get a breath of fresh air, putting up with life amongst brute beasts and wild animals, and demonstrating through it all the firmness of his resolve, the resoluteness of his decision, and the faith in God he displayed, by means of which he bore everything without resentment or complaint.²⁴ It was, of course, because of the fact that he brought all his own resources to bear that he enjoyed also the assistance coming from God in abundance. You see, even if he had to put up with the claustrophobia of life in the ark, nevertheless he escaped the terrible flood and that utter devastation.

24. It is for his moral value that Noe is such a significant figure for Chrysostom, monopolizing the Genesis commentary for nine homilies. See FOTC 74, Introduction (13) and (17).

(18) Hence, after that confinement and intolerable imprisonment, he enjoyed both security and freedom from care, and was accorded commendation by God; in turn he discharged his debt of gratitude in deed, and everywhere you will find the first fruits offered by him. As he had made virtue his practice all his life and steered clear of the wickedness of others, and thus did not feel with them the effects of punishment but was alone preserved when all others drowned, so likewise, since he had brought to bear great faith and endured his life in the ark with thankfulness, blessings from God followed in great abundance: once he disembarked from the ark and was restored to his former lifestyle, immediately he was accorded commendation and in turn demonstrated his own gratitude by giving thanks as far as possible, and thus he was granted further blessings from the loving God. You see, this is God's way, when some trifling menial offering has been made by us, yet because we have made it, he showers upon us gifts in abundance. To learn both the extent of human niggardliness and your Lord's prodigality, give your attention, I ask you, to this present case. I mean, if we want to offer anything, what can we do so worthwhile as to give thanks through words? What comes from him he discharges in actions for our benefit. So what comparison is there between [238] actions and words? After all, our Lord, being protected from need, has no need of anything from us except words; he requires this very expression of thanks in words, not because he personally needs it but to teach us to be grateful and recognize the provider of good things.

(19) Hence Paul too said in his letter, "Be thankful;"²⁵ our Lord looks for nothing from us so much as this practice. Accordingly, let us not be ungrateful, nor allow ourselves to be beneficiaries of his action while showing reluctance to offer thanks to the Lord in word; after all, once more it is to us that the benefit accrues. You see, if we prove thankful in the first instance, we will guarantee a surge of confidence about gaining for ourselves even greater benefits. Only, I beseech

25. 1 Thess 5.18.

you, each day and hour, if it is possible, let us set our minds not only on the common benefits granted by the Creator of all to the whole human race but also those supplied to us privately and individually. Why say those supplied to us privately and individually? Even for those benefits conferred on us in our ignorance let us be thankful. You see, since he is concerned for our salvation, he blesses us in many ways of which we are unaware, often rescues us from perils and confers other blessings upon us. In other words, he is a spring of loving kindness and never ceases providing streams from that source for mankind. So if we keep this in mind and show zeal both in offering thanks to the Lord for his original favors and in preparing ourselves for future favors in such a way that we do not seem to be unworthy of blessings from him, we will be in a position to give evidence of an impeccable lifestyle and avoid the experience of evil. The memory of his blessings will be a sufficient instructor for us in a lifestyle characterized by virtue, and will never allow us to fall victim to indifference and forgetfulness and slip into wickedness. You see, the soul that is alert and on the lookout demonstrates its gratitude not only when things go swimmingly but also when some unfavorable turn of events develops; then it offers equal thanks, not at all enervated by the change in circumstances but rather strengthened by it in the thought of the unspeakable love of God, who having no lack of resources or inventiveness is able even in unfavorable circumstances to demonstrate his concern, even if we are unable to come to a precise understanding of the situation.

(20) Accordingly, let us manage the affairs that affect us in such a way, no matter how things work out, that we make it our one concern to thank him constantly for everything. This is the reason, after all, that we have been made rational creatures and in this we differ from the irrational, that we should offer to the Creator of everything praise, honor and constant glory. His purpose in breathing life into us and giving us the power of speech was that we might have an awareness of the favors done us by him, recognize his lordship, demonstrate our gratitude and offer thanks to the Lord according to our

ability. You see, if people who share the same nature as ourselves render us some mean and paltry favor and frequently require thanks for the trouble they have gone to, not for the sake of our gratitude but that they themselves may gain greater recognition from the affair, so much the more ought we show gratitude to a greater extent in the case of the loving God, whose only interest in this being done is our benefit. [239] I mean, just as in the case of human beings the thanks offered to benefactors redounds to their credit, so in the case of the loving God whenever we make such an offering it redounds to our credit, not because he wants the offering to be made out of a need of praise from us but with a view to the gain accruing to us once again and our rendering ourselves eligible for greater assistance. You see, even if we are unable to do this worthily—how could we, after all, invested as we are with such natural limitations? Why speak of human nature? Not even the incorporeal and invisible powers themselves, the powers and authorities, the Cherubim and the Seraphim are able to offer praise and thanksgiving worthily.

(21) Still, it would be proper to offer thanks according to our ability and constantly glorify our Lord by means of both praise in word and a virtuous lifestyle. This, you see, is the kind of praise that would be particularly telling, when we offer our worship on countless tongues. I mean, the virtuous person leads all of those seeing him to sing the Lord's praises; and praise from them wins for the person providing the occasion great favor beyond all telling from the Lord. So what could be a more fortunate lot than our own if we were in a position of not simply glorifying the good God ourselves with our own tongue but also of stirring many of our fellows to his praise in addition to ourselves? Such, you see, is the force of virtue, that it is able to praise the Creator with countless tongues. In other words, dearly beloved, nothing could be compared with a virtuous lifestyle. Hence the Lord too said, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven."²⁶ Do

26. Matt 5.16.

you see how, just as the light by shining dispels the darkness, so too virtue, when seen, puts evil to flight and by dispelling the darkness of deceit moves the minds of onlookers to praise? Accordingly we ought to exert ourselves to let our good works shine so as to give glory to our Lord. Christ said this, however, not for us to do something by way of display—God forbid—but that we may by a lifestyle characterized by exactness and meeting with his approval provide no occasion of blasphemy to anyone but may through the performance of good deeds encourage onlookers to glorify the God of all. Then, you see, then we will win favor from him to a greater extent and be in a position both to avoid evil and to come into possession of those ineffable blessings, thanks to the grace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, power and honor, now and forever, for ages of ages. Amen.

HOMILY 27

"And Noe built an altar to the Lord, made a choice of all the clean cattle and all the clean birds, and offered sacrifices on the altar."¹



WID YOU NOTICE [239] YESTERDAY the loving Lord's goodness, how he brought the good man out of the ark, freeing him from life there and releasing him from that strange and distressing prison, and bestowed on him the reward for his endurance in the words, "'Increase and multiply.'"² Today let us learn about Noe's gratitude and his thankful soul, through which once more he invited further and greater favor towards him from God. You see, this is what God is like: whenever he sees gratitude in response to initial gifts, [240] he bestows in abundance further gifts from himself. Accordingly let us in our turn be eager to offer thanks to the Lord to the best of our ability for the good things already bestowed on us by him so that we may be accorded greater ones, and let us never forget the blessings coming to us from God, but rather let us always ponder these in our mind so that we may be constantly stirred by the memory of them and give thanks, even if their number is so great that our thinking could never measure up to the challenge of numbering his kindnesses to us.

(2) After all, how could anyone imagine what has already come our way, the promises, the events of each day—the fact that he brought us from non-being to being, that he has blessed us with body and soul, that he has created us rational, that he has given us this fresh air to breathe, that he has formed all creatures for humankind, that he for his part intended from the beginning that human beings should enjoy

1. Gen 8.20.

2. Gen 8.17.

life in the garden, have a life free from pain, be relieved of any distress, and while happening to be in bodily condition to enjoy a status not inferior to the angels and those incorporeal powers but even be proof against bodily needs? Then, when he fell victim to the devil's deceit applied by means of the serpent, he did not then abandon the sinner nor cease blessing the transgressor; instead, even through the punishments he inflicted on him, as I said yesterday also, he showed the extraordinary degree of his characteristic loving kindness and laid up for him many samples of his kindness of other sorts and beyond counting. Later, as time passed and the human race multiplied and strayed into wickedness, he saw them incurring wounds that could not be cured, and so he destroyed the doers of evil like some noxious leaven, sparing this good man for the mission of being a root and beginning for the human race.

(3) Notice once again how much generosity he displayed in his regard. From this good man and his sons he made plans for the whole human race to grow into such a vast multitude; he gradually selected the good men—I mean the patriarchs—and appointed them instructors of the rest of the human race, being able as they were by their own virtue to lead everyone onwards and having the power like doctors to cure the afflicted. He led them on, at one time into Palestine, at another into Egypt, both exercising the endurance of his servants and at the same time revealing more conspicuously his own power; in this manner he continued constantly caring for human beings' salvation by raising up prophets and causing signs and wonders to be performed through them. Then (to make my point brief), just as we would never be able to number the waves of the sea, even if we made the effort countless times, so could we neither compass the range of God's benefits which he has given evidence of in regard to our race—finally, however, when he saw the human race despite so much care still needing his great love beyond all telling, and that no great effect had come from the patriarchs, the prophets, those remarkable wonders, the punishments and reminders frequently applied, and those successive captivities, then

as though pitying our race, he sent his only-begotten son from his fatherly bosom, so to say, and caused him to take the form of a slave,³ be born of a virgin, live in our company and endure our condition [241] in its entirety so that he might be able to bring from earth to heaven our human race which lay here below under the weight of its many sins. This is what astounds the Son of Thunder, realizing as he does the excess of God's love revealed in regard to the human race, and so he shouts aloud in the words, "This, you see, is the extent to which God loved the world."⁴ See how much amazement is expressed by the sentence: "This is the extent," he says, having in mind the magnitude he was about to describe—hence he began in that fashion. So tell us, blessed John, what was "this extent"? Tell us the measure, tell us the magnitude, teach us this excessive degree. "This, you see, is the extent to which God loved the world, that he has given his only-begotten Son so that everyone believing in him may not perish but have eternal life."

(4) Do you see the reason for the coming of the Son to be the following, that those destined to perish would find a means of salvation through faith in him? How would anyone through unaided reason have arrived at an understanding of that great and amazing liberality surpassing all logic which he lavished on our nature through the gift of baptism, granting us freedom from all our sins? But what am I to say? Neither reason suffices to explain it, nor is the mind capable of enumerating the consequences. You see, however much I say, what remains unsaid is so great that the difference exceeds the words already spoken. So how would anyone imagine the way of repentance he has granted to our race in his ineffable love, and after the gift of baptism those wonderful commands through which, provided we are willing, we can win favor from him? Do you see, dearly beloved, the depths of his kindnesses? Do you see that no matter how many we count we

3. Phil 2.7. This is one of those beautiful passages where Chrysostom develops his thinking on the Incarnation that is the basis also of his theology of the scriptural Word.

4. John 3.16.

would never be able to tell a fraction of them? After all, how could human tongue manage to cover in words all the things done for us by God? Accordingly, though they are so numerous and so varied, still much greater and beyond all telling are those benefits he has promised in the life to come after change from here to those who tread the path of virtue. To set before us in a few words the extraordinary degree of their magnitude, blessed Paul says, "what eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him."⁵ Do you see the extravagance of gifts? Do you see his kindnesses surpassing every human imagining: "It has not entered the human heart," he says. If then we are ready to imagine them and make our thanksgiving according to our ability, we will be able to win his favor to a further degree and be stimulated to virtue even more. Recollection of his benefits, you see, suffices to impel us towards the struggle of virtue, to fit us to scorn all present realities, to long for the one who has conveyed such benefits, and to betray a desire for him increasing day by day.

(5) This was the reason, remember, that this good man, too, enjoyed favor and regard from on high, that he showed great gratitude for previous blessings. To make the point clearer to you, however, we must propose for the consideration of your good selves the beginning of today's reading. When he disembarked from the ark, you recall, in accordance with the Lord's direction, along with his sons, his wife and his sons' wives, and with all the wild beasts and the birds, and he received from God together with his [242] release that wonderful blessing that brought him much comfort in the words, "Increase and multiply," the Sacred Scripture says to teach us the good man's gratitude, "Noe built an altar to the Lord, made a choice of all the clean cattle and all the clean birds, and offered sacrifice on the altar."⁶ Notice precisely, dearly beloved, once more in the present words how the Creator of all implanted in nature itself the precise knowledge

5. 1 Cor 2.9, Chrysostom resisting any temptation to improve on the syntax of Paul's OT quotation.

6. Gen 8.20.

we have of virtue. I mean, where, tell me, did the good man acquire this attitude? There was no one else whom he might have had before his eyes. But as in the beginning the child of the first formed human being—I mean Abel—was acting under his own impulse in presenting his offering with great exactness, in just the same way in the present case this good man from his own sound thinking and choice offers thanksgiving to the Lord in sacrifices to the extent of human capability, as he was accustomed to do. See him performing everything with great wisdom; he had need neither of lavish building nor temple, no marvellous house or anything else. You see, he knew, he quite clearly knew that the Lord looks only for one's attitude: building an altar from what lay at hand, and making a choice of the clean cattle and the clean birds, he offered sacrifice and as far as he possibly could he demonstrated his gratitude of his own choosing.

(6) The loving God accepted it and rewarded his attitude, and in turn gave evidence of liberality on his part. Scripture says, "The Lord smelt an odor of fragrance."⁷ See how the attitude of the offerer caused the smoke, the odor and any stench arising from it to give off great fragrance. Hence Paul too said in his letter, "Because we are the fragrance of Christ among those being saved and among those being lost; in the one case an odor of death leading to death, in the other case an odor of life leading to life: an odor of fragrance."⁸ Don't be upset at the concreteness of the expression; rather, attribute the considerateness of the words to your own limitations, and understand from it that the good man's offering proved acceptable. You see, so that we may be in a position to know even through these very events the Lord's independence of any need and the fact that he permitted these things to happen for no other purpose than encouraging human beings to gratitude, accordingly he allows them to be consumed by the fire so that the offerers too may learn from what happens

7. Gen 8.21.

8. 2 Cor 2.15 plus the final phrase from the Gen text, which De Montfaucon notes other editors have expanded to reproduce that entire clause, against the evidence of the MSS.

that everything happens for their benefit. But for what reason, tell me, does he allow all this to happen? This likewise is an example of his considerateness for human limitations: when human beings gradually slipped into indifference and were on the point of devising gods for themselves and performing sacrifices to them, he took the precaution of ensuring they would offer them to him so that in this way at any rate he could check the likelihood of their being ensnared in the deadly deceit.

(7) For proof that all this was permitted by him out of considerateness, consider in the ensuing period the fact that he allowed circumcision to be legislated, not because it had any power to contribute to the salvation of the soul, but in order that the children of the Jews might wear it as an index of their gratitude, like some sign or seal, and that it would not be possible for them to be involved in dealings with the Gentiles. [243] Hence blessed Paul also calls it a sign in the words, "He gave circumcision as a sign, a seal."⁹ You see, for proof that it contributes nothing towards righteousness, behold this good man too, before circumcision had ever been legislated, reaching such a height of virtue. Why mention this? The patriarch Abraham himself before receiving circumcision had been declared righteous on the score of faith alone: before circumcision, the text says, "Abraham believed God, and credit for it brought him to righteousness."¹⁰ Why then, O Jew, do you place great store by circumcision? Learn that before it many people proved themselves good. Abel, for instance, made his offering from faith, as Paul also says: "Through faith Abel made a greater offering to God than Cain";¹¹ Enoch was taken away, Noe escaped that dreadful flood on the score of great goodness, and Abraham before this was commended for his faith in God. Thus right from the very beginning the human race gained salvation on the basis of faith. The reason, of course, that the loving Lord

9. Rom 4.11, "gave" in Chrysostom's text replacing in ours "received," with Abraham as subject. This passage illustrates two kinds of "considerateness," scriptural and historical.

10. Gen 15.6; Rom 4.3.

11. Heb 11.4.

permitted sacrifices to be offered to him was that, when our nature was still in an imperfect condition, it might be able to express its gratitude and at the same time completely avoid the harmful practice of worshipping idols. You see, if despite such a display of considerateness many people still failed to escape disaster, how could anyone have escaped harm from that unless this had happened?

(8) "The Lord smelt an odor of fragrance." This was not, however, true of the ungrateful Jews. What was the case with them? Listen to the words of the inspired writer: "Incense is an abomination to me"¹²—as if to suggest the malice of the offerers' intention. You see, just as in the present case the good man's virtue transformed the smoke and the stench into an odor of fragrance, so in their case the malice of the offerers caused the fragrant incense to smell like an abomination. Consequently, let us earnestly take every opportunity, I beseech you, to demonstrate a sound attitude. This, after all, proves responsible for all our good things. You see, the good Lord is accustomed to heed not so much what is done from our own resources as the intention within, on which we depend for our first move in doing these things, and he looks to that in either approving what is done by us or disapproving it. So whether we pray, or fast, or practice almsgiving (these, after all, being our spiritual sacrifices), or perform any other spiritual work, let us begin with a pure intention in performing it so that we may procure a reward worthy of our efforts. I mean, it would be utterly pointless for us to undergo the effort and yet lose the reward through practicing virtue out of keeping with the laws given by him. It is possible, you see, it is possible through God's ineffable love to win a crown only on the score of our intention, without completing the work. To be convinced of this, consider, I ask you, this example of almsgiving: when you saw a person in the market place, evicted and suffering extreme hunger, and you felt compassion for him and raised your mind to heaven in thanking the Lord both for your good fortune and for the sufferings of

12. Isa 1.13.

the starving person, even if you were not in a position to satisfy his hunger, on the basis of your intention you received your reward in full. Hence the Lord, too, remember, said, "Whoever gives even a cup of cold water on the grounds of discipleship, truly I say to you, he will not lose his reward."¹³ Is there anything [244] of less value than a cup of cold water?

(9) In any case, however, it is necessary to raise these matters with your good selves so that you may gain a precise knowledge of them and put into practice the security that arises from gratitude. Listen, after all, to what Christ says: "Whoever gazes at a woman so as to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."¹⁴ Do you see in this case also condemnation following from the evil intention and punishment inflicted for the thoughtless gaze as if his adultery had been put into effect? Consequently, with this in mind let us in every circumstance look to our intention so that it may ensure that what is done by us proves acceptable. You see, if it turned the smoke and the stench into an odor of fragrance, what effect would it not have on this spiritual worship of ours, and how much favor from above would it not ensure we enjoy? "The Lord smelt an odor of fragrance," the text says. Do you see the good man's actions, how as far as the sight of them was concerned they were in fact paltry, yet were shown to be exceeding great on the basis of his pure intention?

(10) Consider now, I ask you, the surpassing goodness of the loving Lord: "The Lord God took stock and said, 'I will not proceed further to curse the earth for the deeds of human beings, since the human being's mind is bent on evil from youth. So I will not proceed to smite every living being, as I have done, for the future of the earth.'¹⁵ What a volume of kindness, what magnitude of loving kindness, how ineffable the excess of longsuffering! "The Lord God took stock and said": the expression "took stock" is once again humanly phrased, as if with our nature in mind. "I will not proceed

13. Matt 10.42.

15. Gen 8.21-22a.

14. Matt 5.28.

further to curse the earth for the deeds of human beings.'” On the first formed human being, remember, he had placed a curse in the words, “‘Thorns and thistles let it yield,’”¹⁶ and likewise on Cain in similar terms. So when in this case also he inflicted such awful destruction, yet for the purpose of encouraging the good man and leading him to take heart and not be likely to think within himself, what good came of benediction and of the words, “Increase and multiply,” if we were to run the risk again of perishing once we grew to great numbers? (Previously, remember, he had said to Adam, “Increase and multiply,” though still bringing on the deluge)—so to prevent his having these thoughts and being in constant distress through going over this in his mind, notice instead the Lord’s loving kindness: “‘I will not proceed further to curse the earth for the deeds of men.’” See how he indicated that he had inflicted the curse on the earth because of their depravity. Then lest we think that he had made this promise because they had changed for the better, he said, “‘Because the human’s mind is bent on evil from youth.’” A strange form of loving kindness: “‘Because the human’s mind,’” he says, “‘is bent on evil from youth,’” consequently “‘I will no longer proceed to curse the earth.’” In other words he is saying, While I demonstrated my power once and a second time, yet since I see evil on the increase, I promise never again to curse the earth. Then by way of revealing the magnitude of his love, he added, “‘So I will not proceed to smite every living being, as I have done, for the future of the earth.’” Notice, I ask you, how in everything he lavishes the greatest consolation on the good man—or rather, not just on the just [245] man but out of his characteristic goodness on the whole nature of humanity ready to come into existence. That clause, you see, “‘So I will not proceed to smite every living being,’” and “‘as I have done,’” and “‘for the future of the earth’” are indicative of the fact that there would no longer be such a flood nor would such a disaster overwhelm the world. Then he indicates also the permanence of the blessing: “‘For the

16. Gen 3.18.

future,'" he said—that is, for all time I promise never to betray such anger nor cause such chaos either in the confusion of the seasons or the disorder of the elements.

(11) Hence he went on to add: "Seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter shall not be interrupted day or night."¹⁷ Unchangeable, he is saying, will this arrangement be; the earth will never cease supplying its resources to the race of human beings or granting rewards for the hard work of farming, nor will the seasons be interchanged. Instead, cold and heat, summer and winter will be the sequence of each year. You see, since for the period of the deluge a certain confusion occurred in all this arrangement and this good man lived in the ark all this time as if it were one single night, hence God said, Now neither day nor night shall leave its proper course, but rather their service will be uninterrupted to the end of time.

(12) Do you see the comfort quite sufficient and capable of uplifting the good man's spirit? Do you see how much reward he receives for his gratitude? Listen also to what follows as a further example of God's unspeakable generosity. "God blessed Noe and his sons," the text goes on. "He said to them, 'Increase and multiply, fill the earth and gain dominion over it. All the animals of the earth will be in fear and dread of you, all the birds of heaven, everything moving on the earth and all the fish of the sea; I have put them all under your control. Every living creature is there for your food—I have given you them all as I did the green grass—except you are not to eat flesh with its lifeblood in it.'"¹⁸ Here it is proper to marvel at the extraordinary degree of the Lord's goodness; notice, I ask you, once again this good man being accorded the same blessing as Adam, and through his virtue recovering

17. Gen 8.22b, from which Chrysostom detaches those first few words about the earth's future. This time Chrysostom has honored the dogmatic significance of vv. 21–22 in his commentary, so that the modern commentator Von Rad merely paraphrases him: "The contrast between God's punishing anger and his supporting grace, which pervades the whole Bible, is here presented quite untheologically, even almost inappropriately" (*Genesis*, 123).

18. Gen 9.1–4, with a slight assimilation in v. 1 to the similar priestly expression in 1.28, perhaps to reinforce Chrysostom's immediate comment.

the control previously lost—or rather, on account of the Lord's ineffable love. I mean, as he said in the case of the former man, "'Increase and multiply, fill the earth and gain dominion over it; have control of the fish of the sea, the reptiles, the birds of heaven and the animals of earth,'"¹⁹ so now he says, "'All the animals of the earth will be in fear and dread of you, and all the birds of heaven. Every living creature is there for your food—I have given you them all as I did the green grass—except you are not to eat flesh with its lifeblood in it.'" Notice the same rule as that imposed on the first formed man, but differently observed: just as in that case, after entrusting him with control over everything and providing him with enjoyment of things in the garden, he bade him abstain from one tree only, in just the same way in this case, after the blessing and making him an object of fear to the animals and putting the birds under his control, he said, "'Every living creature is there for your food—I have given you them all as I did the green grass.'"

(13) From this the eating of meat takes its beginning, not for the purpose of prompting them to gluttony, [246] but since some of the people were about to offer sacrifices and make thanksgiving to the Lord, he grants them authority over food and obviates any anxiety lest they seem to be abstaining from food on the score of its being consecrated. "'I have given you them all,'" he says, "'as I did the green grass.'" Then, as in the case of Adam he instructed him to abstain from the one tree while enjoying the others, so in this case too, after permitting the consumption of them all without hesitation, he says, "'except you are not to eat flesh with its lifeblood in it.'" So what does this statement mean? It means "strangled," for an animal's blood is its soul. So since they were about to offer sacrifices in the form of animals, he is more or less teaching them in these words that as long as the blood has been set aside for me, the flesh is for you. By doing this, however, he checks ahead of time any impulse of theirs for homicide.

19. Gen 1.28, with variations from Chrysostom's previous text in Homily 10.

(14) To prove this, and also that he does these things out of a wish to make them thereby more cautious, listen to what follows. "For your own lifeblood, you see, (he is saying) I will require an account of all the animals, and of a man I will require an account for his brother's life.'"²⁰ What does that mean? Is blood in fact the soul of the human being? It does not say so—perish the thought; instead, it is employing a human form of expression, as if you were to say to someone, I hold your blood in my hands—that is, I have the power of life and death over you. For proof that blood is not the soul of the human being, listen to Christ's words: "'Don't be afraid of those who kill the body but are incapable of killing the soul.'"²¹ See the extent of the contrast he made.

(15) "'Whoever sheds someone's blood, his own will be shed in payment for that person's blood, because I have made the human being in God's image.'"²² Consider, I ask you, how much fear he struck in them with that remark. Even if kinship proves no obstacle, he is saying, nor fellowship of nature restrains you from evil endeavor and, on the contrary, you thrust aside brotherly feeling and become completely committed to this bloody deed, consider the fact that the person has been created in God's image, the degree of honor accorded him by God, and the fact that he has received authority over all creation—and then give up your murderous intent. So what does he mean? If someone has committed countless murders and shed so much blood, how can he give adequate satisfaction simply by the shedding of his own blood? Don't have these thoughts, human being that you are; instead, consider that before long he will receive an immortal body of the kind that will have the capacity to undergo constant and everlasting punishment.

(16) Notice, however, this point as well, how the command was given with precision: whereas in the case of the human being he said, Don't shed blood, in the case of the brute beasts he did not say, Don't shed it, but, "Except you are not

20. Gen 9.5.

22. Gen 9.6.

21. Matt 10.28.

to eat flesh with the lifeblood in it.'” In one case, Don’t shed it, in this case, Don’t eat it. Do you see how little burden is imposed by his laws? how light and easy his directions? how he looks for nothing burdensome and demanding from our nature? Some people, of course, say animals’ blood is heavy, earthy and nauseating; we on the contrary ought show our observance to arise not from that reason of greater logic but from the Law of the Lord.

(17) Then, so that we might learn precisely the reason why he displayed such precision in this direction, and the fact that in restraining human beings’ murderous intent he said, “‘You, however, increase and multiply, [247] fill the earth and gain dominion over it,’”²³ he did not idly say, “‘You, however,’” but as if to say, Few though you be and few in number, fill the whole earth and gain dominion over it—that is to say, have control, authority and enjoyment. Notice God’s loving kindness, how first he bestows great benefits and only then gives as well law and instruction. Just as in the case of Adam, after placing him in the garden and granting him so much enjoyment; he then imposed on him abstinence from the tree, so also in this case too, after promising never again to inflict such disaster or display such anger but rather to allow all the elements to continue unmoved until the end of time, each keeping to its peculiar course and its particular arrangement, and after bestowing blessings on human beings, favoring them with the pristine authority over all the animals, and guaranteeing them security in their carnivorous diet, he then said, “‘Except you are not to eat flesh with the lifeblood in it.’” Do you see how he first blesses and displays his ineffable love and then gives commands? And yet in the case of human beings this would never happen. People, you see, first want to give effect to what they have commanded, and they manifest great regard for those who accept their commands and see to their discharge, and only then reward those showing complete obedience. With the common Lord of all, however,

23. Gen 9.7, Chrysostom’s text again differing from the Hebrew as at v. 1, though Speiser commends the avoidance of obvious dittography in Hebrew “multiply” (*Genesis*, 57).

it is just the opposite: first he bestows blessing and draws our nature to himself with the plenitude of his blessings, and then gives commands that are light and easy, his purpose being to arouse us with his previous blessings and the ease of the commands, and thus cajole us into carrying out the latter.

(18) Accordingly, let us not be indifferent, dearly beloved, nor prove quite reluctant in heeding his commands, when we consider his previous benefits, the ease of his commands and the magnitude of the promised rewards stored up for us after their fulfilment; rather, let us be on the alert and show enthusiasm for the performance of the directions given us by God. Let us not forsake the ways he has given our nature for achieving the salvation of our soul; instead, let us employ as we should the time remaining in our life, and gain for ourselves in advance great confidence, especially at present when there is still part of the holy season of Lent remaining. You see, the number of days remaining is not really small if we are determined to make some improvement in our frame of mind. I said this, however, not because the correction of our faults requires so much time, but because we have such a kind and loving Lord, who has no need of a long time provided we approach him with much warmth and vigilance, warding off from ourselves all worldly cares and relying on grace from above. The Ninevites also, remember, weighed down though they were with such a mass of sins, when they applied themselves to a keen and intense repentance did not need more than three days to arouse God's goodness and to render void the sentence passed against them. Why mention the Ninevites? The thief on the cross did not need even one day. Why mention one day? Not even a brief hour. Such is God's loving kindness in our regard: when he sees the course of our intention, [248] he does not hesitate or delay; instead, he rapidly brings his liberality to the fore and says, "While you are still speaking, I will say, 'See, here I am.'"²⁴

(19) Accordingly, he will so treat us if we are prepared to give evidence of a degree of zeal in these few days, capitalize

as we ought on the assistance coming from fasting, and make atonement for our indifference by directing fervent prayers to the Lord, shedding warm tears, constantly confessing our sins, submitting our wounds and showing our ulcers as if to a physician and looking for healing from him, as well as bringing to bear other resources of our own—a contrite heart, an exact compunction, generous almsgiving—checking the other passions that disturb our thinking, and ridding our soul of them, not being beset by lust for material gain, bearing neither a grudge against our neighbor, nor hostility against our peers. Nothing, after all, does God so detest and abhor as the person who bears a grudge and constantly maintains hostility in his soul against his neighbor. The harm of this sin is such that it even revokes God's loving kindness! For proof of this, I want to remind you of the parable contained in the gospel, where the man who had received the loan of ten thousand talents from his master fell at his feet and begged and implored him. The text says, remember, "The master took pity on him, discharged him from his obligation and released him from his debt."²⁵ Do you see the master's compassion? The servant had fallen on his knees and begged a longer time be granted him for repayment. "'Have patience with me,'" the text says, remember, "'and I will pay it all back to you.'"²⁶ The good master, however, being caring and loving, yielded to the suppliant's prayers and granted not only as much as he asked but more than he had ever imagined. This, you see, is his manner, always to surpass and anticipate our requests. Consequently, when that servant begged for indulgence to be shown and promised to make payment in full, the Lord, who in his goodness overlooks our faults, was then moved with pity, discharged him from his obligation and released him from his debt. Do you see, on the one hand, what the servant requested and, on the other, how much the Lord granted him?

(20) Notice likewise this very man's unreasonableness: whereas he ought to have conducted himself with fellow-feeling to-

25. Matt 18.27.

26. Matt 18.26.

wards his peers in accordance with the marvellous love shown to him, instead he demonstrated the opposite. The text says, "He went out," this very man who had received a remission of a debt of ten thousand talents. Listen carefully, I beseech you: what happened to this man is sufficient to touch our heart and persuade us to rid our thinking of this baleful disease. "This man went out," then, "and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii." Notice how great the difference: in one case the fellow servant owing him a hundred denarii, in the other the master was the creditor, and the sum in question was ten thousand talents, yet on seeing him begging on his knees he yielded. This servant, on the contrary, "took hold of him by the throat and said, 'Pay me whatever you owe.'"²⁷ What then? The text goes on, "His fellow servant fell to his knees." See how constantly the evangelist repeats this word, "his fellow servant," not idly but for us to learn that there was no difference between them. Yet this man had [249] made the same plea to him that he had made to his master, in the words, "'Have patience with me, and I will pay it all back to you.' But he ignored his plea and threw him into prison until he paid all that was owing to him."²⁸ O what an excess of ingratitude! Despite having fresh in his memory the exercise of so much generosity, he still failed to entertain any compassionate thoughts; instead, he first seized his fellow by the throat, then he cast him into prison.

(21) But see what happens. "On seeing this, however," the text says, "his fellow servants were upset; they went and brought to the notice of their master all that had happened."²⁹ It was not that other servant who grieved (how could he, after all, lying in prison as he was), but his fellow servants, those who, while not being wronged, behaved as though they had been wronged; they were distressed in that way, and went and brought everything out into the open. But now notice the master's anger: "Then summoning him," the

27. Matt 18.28.

29. Matt 18.31.

28. Matt 18.30.

text goes on, "he said, 'Wicked servant.'" You can get a true picture here of the extent of the damage wrought by the malicious behavior: the master did not call him evil when he was dishonest about the ten thousand talents, but only at this point, when he proved harsh to his fellow servant. "'Wicked servant,'" he said, "'I forgave you all your debt when you begged me.'"³⁰ See how he shows the extremity of the man's wickedness! Surely you could have exerted yourself further? Did you not speak only paltry words to me, and yet I accepted your supplication and discharged all that huge debt beyond all telling? "Should you also not have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you?"³¹ What excuse could you claim if, while I the master discharged such a heavy weight of debts on account of those paltry words, you on the contrary had no mercy on that fellow servant of equal standing with yourself, nor did you yield to his entreaties, nor did you recall to mind the favors done you by me and display some compassion towards him; instead, you proved unmerciful and inhumane, and refused to have pity on your fellow servant. Hence in this case you are to learn from experience the extent of the troubles to which you have made yourself liable. "Falling into a rage the master handed him over to the torturers." Notice also the master now enraged on account of his inhumanity to his fellow servant, and his handing him over to the torturers; what didn't happen previously when the servant was owing so many debts he now orders to happen. "He handed him over to the torturers until he paid his debt in full"³²—until (the text says) he should repay all those ten thousand talents which he had previously been forgiven.

(22) Great is God's loving kindness and beyond all telling: when the servant practiced his wiles in playing the suppliant, he released him from his obligation; but when he saw him proving harsh and inhumane, then he revoked his characteristic generosity for the future to show him through the events themselves that he had wronged him more than he had his

30. Matt 18.32.

32. Matt 18.34.

31. Matt 18.33.

fellow servant. Just as he had thrown his fellow servant into prison until he paid what was owing, so likewise the master handed him over to the torturers until he should repay his debt in full. These words, however, about talents and denarii he did not speak idly; instead, his words are about sin and the immensity of our failings, so that we may learn that, though we are due to pay a debt to the Lord for our countless faults, we receive from him a remission of them on account of his ineffable love. If, however, we prove harsh and inhuman towards our fellow servants and our peers and those who share our nature with us, and do not cancel the faults they commit against us, but rather act badly on the grounds of those peccadillos (after all, whatever the difference between a hundred denarii and ten thousand [250] talents, so much the greater the difference between our sins against the Lord and those done us by our peers), then we will call down on our own heads the Lord's anger, and for the debts of which we have received remission we will force him to require strict accounting under torture.

(23) You see, for us to learn precisely that the Lord constructed this parable for the benefit of our souls, listen to the epilogue: "This is what your Father in heaven will do to you if each of you does not forgive his brother his failings from his heart."³³ Great is the gain from this parable, if only we are prepared to heed it; how could we extend as much forgiveness as is extended to us by the Lord? Whereas we extend forgiveness to our fellow servants—and then only if we are in the mood—it is from the Lord that we in our turn receive remission. Notice also the precision of the expression: he did not simply say, If you do not forgive people their sins, but what? "If each of you does not forgive his brother his failings from his heart." Notice how he wants even our hearts to have the good fortune to enjoy peace and quiet, our thinking to be undisturbed and rid of every passion, and ourselves to demonstrate great loving kindness towards our neighbor. Elsewhere too you can hear him saying this: "If you forgive

33. Matt 18.35.

people their failings, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.'"³⁴ So let us not think when we do this that it is to someone else we are doing a good turn or bestowing a great favor on them. It is we ourselves, after all, who reap the benefit of our good deed, and accord great gain to ourselves from the action, just as, if we fail to do it, we likewise do not manage to wrong them but lay up for ourselves the unspeakable torment of hell fire.

(24) Consequently, I beseech you, let us keep this in mind and no longer bear to hold a grudge against those who have done us an injury or otherwise wronged us in some way, nor be badly disposed towards them; instead, let us consider of how much kindness and confidence for us with the Lord they prove to be instruments, and before all else the fact that reconciliation with those who injure us turns out to be a discharge of our sins. Thus let us show all enthusiasm and effort, and out of consideration of the gain accruing from this let us display as much care of those who injure us as if they were really our benefactors. In other words, if we look at things in the cold light of reason, those kindly disposed towards us and those anxious to serve our every need will not succeed in benefiting us as service of those others, which will render us deserving of favor from above and will lighten the load of our sins. Consider, dearly beloved, how important is this virtuous behavior to judge from the rewards promised by the God of all things to those who practice it. He said, remember, "'Love your enemies, bless those who persecute you, pray for those who abuse you,'"³⁵ since these directions were very demanding and aspiring to the very summit of perfection, he added, "'so that you may be like your Father in heaven, because he makes his sun rise on good and evil, and sends rain on just and unjust.'"³⁶ Do you see whom that person resembles—as far as is humanly possible—who not only takes no vengeance on those who harm him, but even shows

34. Matt 6.14.

35. Chrysostom here seems to achieve a conflation of Matt 5.44 and Luke 6.27.

36. Cf. Matt 5.45.

zeal in praying for them? Accordingly, let us not deprive ourselves through indifference of such gifts and rewards surpassing [251] all description, but rather evince enthusiasm for this kind of virtue by every means and, by disciplining our thinking, respond to God's command.

(25) After all, the reason that I delivered this exhortation in the present case and brought the parable to the fore, and the reason for demonstrating the importance of virtuous behavior and the extent of the gain accruing to us from it, was that while there is still time each of us should exert ourselves, in the event of there being someone at enmity with him, to reconcile him by means of assiduous attention. Let no one tell me that he has made overtures once and a second time but his enemy has not come round: if we approach this with un-mixed motives, we will not give up before we prevail through intense supplication, and thus win him over and turn him from his hostility to us. I mean, surely it is not he who is the recipient of gifts from us? It is to us that benefits come: we win favor from God, we secure remission of sins for ourselves, and gain from this great confidence with the Lord. If we behave this way, we will be able with a clear conscience to approach this sacred, awe-inspiring table and pronounce with confidence those words associated with the prayer. The initiated know what is to be said. Hence I leave it to the conscience of each one to know how by discharging this command we can with confidence utter these words at that fearful time. If, however, we fall into indifference, what terrible condemnation would we bring on ourselves by doing the opposite of our words, daring to pronounce the words of the prayer idly and without thought, fuelling a more intense fire for ourselves, and calling down on us the Lord's anger?

(26) I rejoice and am gratified to see you hearing the words with pleasure and showing through your applause that you are anxious to be ready and to put into practice this exhortation of the Lord. This, after all, is physic for your soul, this is balm for your wounds, this the best way to win the satisfaction of God, this the surest sign of a soul that loves God—to accept everything on account of the Law of the Lord and not

to be overcome by the limitations of reasoning, but instead to prove superior to passions by recollecting the kindnesses daily done us by God. No matter how much effort we expend, we will be unable to express the least part of the benefits already accorded us, nor those happening to us daily, nor the good things laid up for us on condition of our putting into practice the commands given us from him. Accordingly, let each of us in leaving here perform this good work, show enthusiasm for it as if for the most wonderful treasure and not delay in the slightest. Even if we have to labor, even if we have to search, even if we have to go on a long journey, even if there are certain difficulties, let us dispose of all these problems. Let us make it our concern how we may put into practice the command of the Lord, and thus gain the reward of obedience. After all, surely I am not ignorant that it seems a difficult and burdensome duty to make approaches to the person who nourished grievances and enmity against you, and to stand and converse with him? If, however, you consider the dignity of the promise and the greatness of the reward and the fact that the effect of kindly behavior reaches not only the beneficiary but also you yourself, everything will seem to you light and easy.

(27) Accordingly, let us turn this over in our mind, and so get the better of habit and with pious thinking fulfil Christ's commands so that we may also be judged worthy of rewards from him, thanks to the grace and love of his goodness, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, power and honor, now and forever, for ages of ages. Amen.

HOMILY 28

*"And God said to Noe and to his sons with him, 'Lo, I am making my covenant with you and with your offspring after you, and with every living being that is with you, including both birds and cattle, and with all the wild beasts of the earth.'"*¹



ESTERDAY [252] I BROUGHT TO YOUR ATTENTION the commendation accorded Noe by the Lord after he had built an altar following his disembarkation from the ark, and was offering sacrifices of thanksgiving and had demonstrated his gratitude. But we were unable to proceed further and deal completely with the reading by showing the loving God's considerateness and care displayed in regard to the good man. I mean, since our sermon had been prolonged to great length, we concluded it rapidly lest your memory be overwhelmed by the plethora of words and the things yet unspoken be impaired by what has been said already. You see, our anxiety was not simply to say a great deal; rather, we wanted to say the kind of things that it would be possible for you to retain in your memory and leave here enriched. After all, if it was likely that we said more than was proper and you gained nothing from what was said, what would be the use of that? Accordingly, in the knowledge that we have undertaken this task for the sake of your benefit, we also consider we have received sufficient reward if we see your progress in grasping our words precisely, and if you store them away in the recesses of your mind, constantly pondering and ruminating on them.

(2) You see, recollection of words already spoken prepares you to receive with greater ease those yet to be spoken, and thus become in the future instructors of others. This, after

1. Gen 9.8–10, the LXX omitting the final phrase of the Hebrew.

all, is the object of all our vigilance and enthusiasm, that you would all become perfect and complete, and that nothing of the contents of the Holy Scriptures would escape you. Acquaintance with them, remember, will also make the greatest contribution to your progress towards an excellent life, provided you are prepared to be sober and alert, and will make you readier for the difficulties virtue involves. You see, whenever it has come to our attention that all of those good people who relied on their considerable trust in God to pass the whole of their life in trials and tribulations and give evidence of great endurance and thanksgiving were as a result found worthy of reward, how could we in our turn fail to show eagerness to travel by the same path as they so as likewise to enjoy the same reward as theirs? Hence I beseech you to make each day some effort both towards your growth in God's grace and to maintaining in security and close observance your previous good behavior, as well as supplying for any omissions, so that in this way you may reach the very pinnacle of virtue to my satisfaction, the building up of the Church and the glory of Christ. Seeing, after all, your insatiable interest in spiritual instruction, I do not cease daily, despite my awareness of my own extreme inadequacy, to offer you nourishment from the Holy Scriptures and to propose for your hearing whatever the love of God provides out of his characteristic benevolence and with a view to your benefit.

(3) So come now, today, too, let us demonstrate to your good selves the extraordinary degree of God's love, which he manifests in regard to the human race, by drawing attention to the very words spoken by God to Noe. "God said to Noe and to his sons." After blessing him and his sons in the words, "Increase and multiply," and entrusting him with [253] control of all the animals and giving him authority to enjoy a share of them in the manner of vegetables for eating, and instructing him not to eat flesh with the blood in it, still caring as he was for the good man and those due to come later and ever anxious to ply our nature with kindness, he added even greater benefits in the words, "God said to Noe and to his sons with him, 'Lo, I am making my covenant with you and

with your offspring after you, and with every living being that is with you, including both birds and cattle, and with all the wild beasts of the earth that are with you, including all that disembarked from the ark. I will keep my covenant with you: no more will all creatures perish in the water of the deluge, and never again will there be a deluge to destroy the whole earth.'"² Chances were that the good man was still beside himself and his mind still prey to fear; and it was likely that if some light shower should happen to fall, he would be bound to become distraught and quite upset at the thought of such a deluge overwhelming the world once again. Hence the good Lord took steps to instil confidence into him and all those in future, knowing as he did that even a chance concern would succeed in alarming him, past experience having proved sufficient to frighten him out of his wits. Since therefore the odds were that this blessed man would be utterly terrified at even a passing shower, the good God for this reason, as if taking steps to encourage him and free him from all fear, as well as reduce him to a state of complete security and tranquillity, promised never to inflict such dreadful punishment again. This promise he had in fact already made even before the blessing when he said, as you heard, "I will not proceed to curse the earth.'"³ Even if people continue their display of wickedness, yet I no longer submit the human race to such terrible punishment. In other words, he shows his ineffable love by making the promise once again so that the good man may be able to take heart and not come to the following conclusion: After first bestowing blessings on the human race and causing us to multiply in number, he brought this ruin upon us.

(4) His purpose, therefore, was to eliminate all apprehension from Noe's thinking and for him to be quite assured that this would not happen again. He said, remember, Just as I brought on the deluge out of love, so as to put a stop to their wickedness and prevent their going to further extremes, so in this case too it is out of my love that I promise never to do

2. Gen 9.8-11.

3. Gen 8.21.

it again, so that you may live free of all dread and in this way see your present life to its close. Hence he said, "Behold I make my covenant," that is, I form an agreement. Just as in human affairs when someone makes a promise he forms an agreement and gives a firm guarantee, so too the good Lord said, "Behold, I make my covenant." He was right in saying, "I make," instead of, Behold I renew the disaster brought on by their sins; "I make my covenant with you and your offspring after you." See the Lord's loving kindness: not only with your generation, he says, do I form my agreement, but also in regard to those coming after you I give this firm guarantee.

(5) Then to show his characteristic generosity he says, "and with every living being that is with you, including both birds and cattle, and with all the wild beasts of the earth that are with you, including all that disembarked from the ark. I will keep my covenant with you: no more will all the creatures perish in the water of the deluge, [254] and never again will there be a deluge to destroy the whole earth." Do you see the extent of the agreement? Do you see the unspeakable generosity of the promises? Notice how once again he extends his loving kindness to the animals and wild beasts—and rightly so: what I have often said before I say again now. That is, since these creatures had been created for the human for that reason they now share the kindness shown humanity. While the covenant with the latter and with the animals seems identical, in fact it is not. This too happens for the human's consolation, you see, so that he may be in a position to know how much esteem he enjoys, since not only is the favor bestowed on himself, but also that all the animals have a share in enjoying the Lord's generosity on his account. "No more will all creatures perish," the text says, "in the water of the deluge, and never again will there be a deluge to destroy the whole earth."

(6) Do you see how once, a second time, and more frequently he promises never again to inflict such an awful disaster, so as to eliminate fear from the good man's thoughts and cause him to be optimistic about the future? Then, con-

sidering not his own nature but our limitations, he is not content with the verbal promise, but demonstrates his consideration in our regard by supplying also a sign valid for all time and capable of freeing the human race of this terrible fear, with the result that even if a heavy shower should fall, even if a wild storm should break, or if the tide should reach to a flood, not even then would we be able to feel fear but rather feel confidence by contemplating the sign given us. "Then the Lord God said to Noe: 'This is the sign of the covenant which I am making between me and you.'"⁴ See the great regard he displays for the good man; like one person speaking with another, he makes his agreement with him in just the same fashion in the words, "'This is the sign of the covenant which I am making between me and you, and with every living creature that is with you for all generations.'" Do you see that the sign due to be given to every creature is made valid for eternal generations? Not only does he give the sign to all creatures alike, but he also makes it never-ending and coterminous with the duration of the world. So what is the sign? "'I am putting my bow in the clouds, and it will act as a sign of a covenant between me and the earth.'"⁵ See, along with the verbal promise he also gives the sign, namely, the rainbow, which some people say is caused by the sun shedding its rays on the clouds. In case my word is not sufficient, he is saying, behold I also give a sign that I will never again inflict such an awful punishment; so when you see the sign, you will be freed of fear. "'When I bring clouds on the earth, my bow will be visible in the clouds, and I will remember my covenant between me and you and every living being of every kind.'"⁶ What are you saying, O blessed author? I will recall (he is saying) my covenant—that is, the guarantee, the promise—not because he needs to recall it, but for us to fix our eyes on that sign given us and thus suspect no trouble; instead, by remembering at once God's promise we are able to be confident that we will suffer nothing like that again.

4. Gen 9.12.

6. Gen 9.14–15.

5. Gen 9.13.

(7) Do you see God's considerateness, how much care he shows our race, the great extent of the loving kindness he has displayed, not because he saw the change in human beings but for the purpose of teaching us through every event the extraordinary degree of his [255] goodness? "‘Never again will there be a deluge to wipe out every creature;’"⁷ never again will there be a downpour like that. Since he knew the human race were afraid of that, see how he constantly makes the promise as if to say, Even if you see a great rush of water falling, don't suspect any trouble in that event: "‘There will be no deluge to wipe out every creature;’" never again will the human race experience anger like that. "‘My bow will be in the clouds, and sight of it will remind me of an eternal covenant between God and all living beings of every kind.’"⁸ Notice the utter ordinariness of the language he employs out of a wish to induce confidence and security in the human race. I will see, he says, that I remember my covenant. Does that therefore mean that sight jogs his memory? This is not the conclusion we are to come to—God forbid—but that when we see the sign, we may take heart at God's promise, especially as it is impossible for God's promises to fail.

(8) "God said to Noe," the text goes on, "‘This is the sign of the covenant I made between me and all creatures that are upon the earth.’"⁹ You recognized, he is saying, the sign I gave of agreement between me and every creature living on the earth. Worry your head no longer, nor upset your thinking; instead, fix your gaze on this and allow yourself the luxury of firm hope, let all those coming after you enjoy comfort from this sign, and let sight of it provide the basis for confidence that never again will such an awful deluge destroy the world. I mean, even if people's sins are intensified, nevertheless I will keep these promises I have made: I will vent no longer such terrible anger on everyone. Do you see the excess of his goodness? Do you see the extent of his considerateness? Do you see the degree of his care? Do you see his promise of

7. This time Chrysostom quotes v. 11 in a different form—a common enough departure for a preacher.

8. Gen 9.16.

9. Gen 9.17.

generosity? After all, he did not simply extend his kindness to two or three or even ten generations; instead, he promised it would last as long as the duration of the universe so that we might be the wiser for each instance, both the fact that they suffered such terrible punishment for the enormity of their sins and also the fact that we were accorded such marvellous promise owing to his ineffable love. People of sense, you see, are drawn to obedience of commands rather by kindnesses than by punishments.

(9) Accordingly, let us not prove ungrateful; even if before we gave evidence of any good, or rather while we were actually practicing things deserving of punishment, he granted us such lavish kindness, what great generosity would he still not accord us from his richness provided we prove grateful, demonstrate our thanks for his previous favors and work a great change for the better? If he bestows favors on us despite our being unworthy and is kindly disposed towards sinners, what good things would we not meet with, provided we desist from evil and follow virtue? You see, the reason why he takes the initiative in laying up for us many blessings and grants a further opportunity of pardon to sinners instead of immediately inflicting penalties is this: that through every means he may win us over, in every way ply us with blessings, in every manner show us longsuffering. Frequently, however, while he punishes some by every means, his intention is to encourage others so that they may be brought to their senses through fright at the unfortunate and avoid experiencing punishment. Do you see his inventive love, how everything done by him happens with this sole object in view [256]—our salvation?

(10) So with this in mind let us not be remiss, or neglect virtue, or bypass the laws laid down by him. You see, if he sees us repentant and at peace and quite resolved on making a start, he both comes to our aid with resources of his own by rendering everything easy and light for us and also does not allow us even to feel the effects of the effort virtue involves. I mean, whenever the soul directs its faculties towards God, it can no longer be deceived by the appearance of visible

realities; instead, it passes them all by and takes less careful note of these things that fall under our gaze than of those realities that are not seen by our bodily eyes and are not subject to change but remain constant, as it is their nature to be fixed and unmoved. Such, you see, are the eyes of the mind: they concentrate uninterruptedly on those latter realities and, contemplating everything of this present life in the light of the radiance from them, pass them by as if some dream or shadow, no longer subject to deception nor able to be beguiled. Instead, even if they see wealth, they immediately mock it in their knowledge that it shifts from one person to another with less reliability than any runaway slave and, far from being constant, it brings countless troubles on its possessors, drives them to the very brink of disaster (so to say) and throws them over. Should they happen to spy some bodily beauty, they still do not lose their balance but consider its susceptibility to death and corruption and the fact that disease suddenly attacks and blights that beauty completely and, before the onset of disease, age takes effect and renders repulsive and ugly the face that was previously beautiful, whereas death, on the other hand, makes its assault and utterly wastes the body in its prime. Should they see someone clad in glory or sovereignty or scaling the very pinnacle of honors, and enjoying complete health and happiness, they ignore him as someone with no sure or firm foundation but only an inflated esteem for things that will leave him high and dry more surely than the currents of a river. After all, what is of less value than all the glory of this present life when it is compared to the grass in flower? "All human glory," Scripture says, remember, "is like grass in flower."¹⁰ Do you see, dearly beloved, how clearly the eyes of faith see when the mind is directed to God? Do you see how they can be beguiled by no visible reality? Instead, they have an accurate assessment of things and are subject to no deception.

(11) If you don't mind, however, let us once more resume the thread of our sermon, put a few matters before you and

10. Isa 40.6 LXX.

bring our instruction to a close so as to fix in your minds the remembrance of what has been said. When, as you recall, Sacred Scripture completed its account of the divine sign, its intention once again was to teach us the matters related to the good man and his sons in saying, "Now, the sons of Noe who disembarked from the ark were Shem, Cham and Japheth. Now, Cham was father of Canaan. These three were Noe's sons; beginning with them people spread out over the whole earth."¹¹ It is worth enquiring at this point why in mentioning the three sons of Noe, Sacred Scripture added, "Now, Cham was the father of Canaan." Don't think, I beg you, this detail was tossed in to no purpose: there is nothing of the contents of Sacred Scripture which is spoken without some purpose that involves great benefit concealed beneath the surface. So why did it draw this to our attention by adding, "Now, Cham was the father of Canaan"? It intends in this way to hint to us the extraordinary degree of his intemperance by the fact that not even the magnitude [257] of the disaster nor the terribly straitened conditions in the ark caused him to control himself; instead, even though his elder brother had not yet at this stage had children, he indulged himself in incontinence at a time when the world was in the grip of such awful distress and disaster, and gave himself up to intercourse; far from putting a check on the impulse of desire, already from the very outset the depravity of his attitude had become clear. So, when a little later his son Canaan is due to receive the curse for the disrespect towards the father of the family, Sacred Scripture had already anticipated its announcement on that account and revealed to us the name of the child at the same time as the intemperance of its father; the purpose was that when you later see him giving evidence of ingratitude towards his father, you would be in a position to know that right from the very beginning he was the kind of person not to be restrained even by the disaster. I mean, deep apprehension is sufficient to quench pleasure of all kinds, and there is nothing so capable of checking this flame and fury as depth of appre-

11. Gen 9.18.

hension and excess of ill fortune. So when this person in the midst of such troubles displays such a frenzy and lust for siring offspring, what excuse could be made for him?¹²

(12) At this point, however, another question arises for us, that well known one that is bandied about everywhere: why does the son receive the curse when it is the father who is guilty of sin? But in case we are now making the sermon too long, we will leave this point to next time, so that when we reach that place in the text we may then also offer whatever solution God provides. You see, there is nothing of the contents of Sacred Scripture, as I said before, that you can find written there without some reason. So for the time being we know that it was not idly or by chance that Moses mentioned the son's name in saying, "Now, Cham was the father of Canaan. These three were Noe's sons; beginning with them people spread out over the whole earth." Let us in our turn, dearly beloved, not pass this present verse idly by, but rather grasp from this very remark as well the greatness of God's power. "These three were Noe's sons," the text says; "beginning with them people spread out over the whole earth." How could they have sufficed for that? How could the whole world come into existence from these few? How did their bodies manage to survive? There was no doctor to apply healing, no other kind of therapy. You see, there were not even any cities yet founded; instead, after the awful distress of their life in the ark they disembarked shrivelled up, as it were, after being shut in, so how could they have failed to expire after having the misfortune of being in such terrible isolation and unspeakable solitude? How did they not perish? Tell me, after all, would not fear and anxiety unhinge their mind and derange their thinking?

(13) Don't be surprised, dearly beloved: God it was who was managing everything, and the Creator of our nature was removing all these difficulties, and that direction of his in the words, "'Increase and multiply, and fill the earth,'"¹³ also

12. Chrysostom asks the same question of the text's reference to Canaan here as do modern commentators, but with much greater moral elaboration.

13. Gen 1.28.

granted them this increase. The Israelites, too, when they were confined in Egypt working with clay and making bricks, all the more in these circumstances did they grow into a vast multitude, and neither the pitiless and cruel command of Pharaoh requiring male children to be cast into the river, nor the rest of the ill treatment they endured from their task-masters [258] was successful in reducing their numbers; rather, they grew in numbers even further. Grace from above, you see, was bringing everything to a successful conclusion through adversity. Accordingly, when God gives his command, don't seek to subject things to examination according to human procedures: he is, after all, superior to our nature and so has no need of human procedures, but even through the very obstacles he causes things to flourish. In just the same way in the present case, too, he peopled the whole world from these three men. The text says, "Beginning with these three, people spread out over the whole earth." Do you see God's power? Do you see how, even though the obstacles were many, there was nothing to thwart his will?

(14) You can see the same thing happening in the case of the faith: despite such adversaries, despite such conspirators and the opposition of kings, tyrants and mobs directing their every effort at quenching the spark of faith, through these very conspirators, through their anxiety to impede progress the flame of religion was fanned to such an extent as to engulf the whole world, inhabited and uninhabited. I mean, if you travel as far as India, as far as Scythia, to the very end of the world, even to the great Ocean, everywhere you will find the teaching of Christ illuminating the souls of all people. You see, the strange and remarkable thing is that the preaching of religion reformed even the barbarian races themselves; they developed a thirst for knowledge, they gave up their old ways and adopted religion instead. Just as the Creator of all caused the number of human beings to multiply through these three men, in just the same way in the case of the faith, he won over the whole world through eleven men—fishermen, illiterate, untutored, not even bold enough to open their mouths. These illiterate, untutored fishermen stopped the

mouths of philosophers, and like winged creatures traversed the whole world sowing the teaching of religion, pruning away the thorns, rooting out inveterate habits, and in every place planting Christ's laws. Neither the fact of their being few in number, nor their lack of tutoring, nor the severity of what they commanded, nor the fact that the human race was in bondage to inveterate habits was sufficient to prove an obstacle to them; instead, grace paved the way for removing all these difficulties, and so they achieved everything with ease by gaining a firmer resolve through the very obstacles. When on one occasion they were scourged, you recall, they went off rejoicing, not simply on account of the scourging, but "for the fact that they had been thought worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Christ,"¹⁴ whereas on another occasion when they were thrown into prison and were set at liberty by the angel, they still continued the same practices: going as far as the temple they sowed the word of their teaching, landing the people in their net in the cause of religion. Arrested again, they not only did not lose their resolve on that occasion but displayed even greater outspokenness, rising amidst a mob that raged and ground its teeth to declare, "'God must be obeyed rather than men.'"¹⁵

(15) Do you see the extent of their outspokenness? Do you see these untutored fishermen scorning such demented crowds that were ready to wreak death and destruction? When, however, dearly beloved, you hear this, attribute its occurrence, not to these men, but to grace from above which gave them strength and stimulated their readiness. Even blessed Peter himself, when he restored the use of his limbs to the man who was lame from his mother's womb, [259] to the amazement and wonder of everyone at their gifts, made no secret of his own gratitude in saying, "'Gentlemen, why are you staring at us as if we are responsible for his walking through our own power or religious spirit?'"¹⁶ Why is it, he is saying, that you are amazed and astounded at what has happened? I

14. Acts 5.41.

16. Acts 3.12.

15. Acts 5.29.

mean, surely we aren't the ones who have worked this miracle, or restored him to health by our own power and made him walk, are we? Why are you staring at us? We have contributed nothing beyond making our tongues available, whereas the one who has achieved it all is the Lord and Creator of our nature. He is "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob," whom you entitle patriarchs; he is the one "whom you betrayed and disowned before Pilate when his verdict had been to acquit him"—he it is who has achieved this, the one "whom you disowned, holy and good though he is, and asked for a murderer to be spared you, whereas you condemned the author of life, but God raised him from the dead and we are his witnesses. Through faith in his name this man, whom you see and know, his name has restored to vigor; faith which comes through him gave the man full strength in the presence of you all."¹⁷

(16) What exceeding great forthrightness of speech! How unspeakably efficacious the power of the grace vouchsafed them from on high! This blessed man's outspokenness would have been the clearest testimony of the Resurrection. What greater sign could anyone seek to have than this when the one, who before the Crucifixion could not withstand the threat of a mere girl now rises in opposition, to the Jewish people in this fashion and on his own berates them despite their uncontrolled fury and utters such things as were capable of rousing their fury to greater heights? Do you see, dearly beloved, how this also in the present instance demonstrates what I was saying in the beginning? When anyone is on fire with love for God, no longer can he bear to see the things that fall under the gaze of these bodily eyes of ours; instead, he employs other eyes—I mean the eyes of faith—and in everything he has his sights on those other realities and he keeps his mind directed towards them. He walks on earth as though all his business was in heaven, and in this way discharges all his duties, being unhindered in the pursuit of virtue by any human preoccupation. Such a person, you see,

17. Acts 3.13-16.

no longer has an eye for life's attractive features, no longer its harsh and difficult features, but passes them all by in pressing on towards his true homeland. Just as the contestant in this bodily race who runs with great concentration sees none of his opponents, no matter how many times he comes across them, but keeps his mind intent on the race, and thus easily overcomes everything in pressing on towards the goal he has set himself, in just the same way the person keen to run the race of virtue and desirous of leaving earth to reach heaven surrenders all visible things here below, becomes engrossed in the race and does not stop nor allow himself to be hindered by any visible thing before he succeeds in arriving at the very summit. In other words, to the person so disposed, whatever in this present life has a frightening aspect becomes contemptible; such a person has fear neither of sword, nor precipice, wild animals' teeth, torture, arrest by executioner, nor any other of life's hardships; instead, even if he sees the way strewn with burning coals he treads it as though he saw only meadows and gardens; even if he spies some other form of punishment besetting him, he does not become [260] numb at the sight nor turn back. Desire for future realities, you see, has transformed his attitude: as though clad in a body accidentally and for no purpose, he proves superior to passions, and guarded by grace from above he does not even feel the effect of bodily distress.

(17) So I beseech you: with a view to being able to bear without difficulty the effort which virtue involves, let us give evidence of great love of God, and by devoting our attention in that direction let us not be deflected by any of this life's concerns in our course towards that goal. Instead, let us keep in mind the constant enjoyment of future blessings and thus bear without distress the hardships of the present life: let insult not disturb us, nor poverty oppress us, nor bodily ailment sap the energy of our soul's purpose, nor scorn and derision on the part of the majority render us listless in practicing virtue. Let us rather shake off all these irritations like dust, adopt a noble and elevated attitude, and thus take a stance of great fortitude to all problems. As we recommended

to your good selves yesterday, let us with all zeal be reconciled with our enemies and dispel the remaining passions from our soul: should untimely desire beset us, let us ward it off; should choler arouse our anger, let us suppress its upsurge with the singing of spiritual exhortations and thus show in its true light the ruin that passion brings. "A man of quick temper," Scripture says, remember, "is not honorable;"¹⁸ and again, "The person who is angry with his brother without cause shall be liable to the hell of fire."¹⁹ Should desire for money unbalance our thinking, let us be quick to shun this noxious ailment and expel it for what it is—the root of all evils. Let us be zealous in correcting each of the passions that beset us, so that by avoiding harmful ways and practicing those that are good we may on that dread day be judged worthy of God's loving kindness, thanks to the grace and mercy of his only-begotten Son, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, power and honor, now and forever, for ages of ages. Amen.

18. Prov 11.25 LXX.

19. Matt 5.22.

HOMILY 29

"Noe, the first tiller of the soil, planted a vineyard. He drank some wine and got drunk."¹



Y NOW [260] WE HAVE REACHED the final stage of our presentation dealing with the just man. Hence, I beseech you, summon up your attention and heed my words precisely. From today's reading, you see, it is possible to reap benefits that are not small or accidental: what happened to people of former ages proves to be a subject of the greatest instruction for us, provided we are ready to be alert. This, I mean, is the reason that a record has been kept of their sins, that we may shun the latter and emulate the former—and not only to this end, but as well Sacred Scripture shows you good people often failing, and sinners giving evidence of radical conversion, so that from both sources we may achieve sufficient assurance, the man who stands firm not being over-confident once he sees the just losing their step, nor the man in sin not despairing thanks to the prospect of many people making amends and managing to ascend to the very summit. So let none of you, I beg you, grow over-confident, even should they be conscious of their many achievements, but rather be anxious, [261] heeding the recommendation of blessed Paul's words, "So let the one who seems to stand firm take care not to fall."² Let the one who has slumped to the very depths of evil not despair of his own salvation, but rather consider God's unspeakable love and

1. Gen 9.20–21, where Speiser suggests the Hebrew would be better translated, "Noe, a man of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard." Chrysostom's commentary shows he, too, grasped that sense, despite the LXX text.

2. 1 Cor 10.12.

also heed God speaking through the inspired author, "Does whoever falls rise again; does the one who turns away return?"³ and again, "I don't wish the sinner's death as much as his turning from evil to live."⁴ Do you see, dearly beloved, how every item written in Sacred Scripture has been recorded for no other purpose than our benefit and the salvation of the human race?

(2) With this in mind, then, let each of us apply the remedies from Scripture appropriate to ourselves. This, you see, is the reason these matters are freely proposed to everyone: people of good will are able to apply the fitting remedy to the ailment that is threatening them and secure a rapid return to health—provided someone doesn't resist the healing processes of the treatment, but rather gives evidence of personal gratitude. There is, after all, no ailment of soul or body besetting the human race which cannot come to healing from this source. Why is that, tell me? A person comes to this source burdened with care and the pressure of affairs, and on that account is overwhelmed with despair on entering—only to hear at once the words of the inspired author, "Why are you grief-stricken, my soul, and why do you disquiet me? Hope in God, for I shall praise him, my God, the help of my countenance";⁵ receiving sufficient encouragement from this, he goes away throwing off all that faintheartedness. Likewise another person is oppressed by poverty and at his last gasp, depressed at seeing others flush with money, full of their own importance and putting on airs; this person in turn hears the words of the same inspired author, "Cast your care upon the Lord, and he will sustain you";⁶ and again, "Don't worry when someone becomes rich and the luxury of his house increases, because at his death he will not take any of it with him."⁷ Another person, too, is in dire straits through being subjected to scheming and calumnies, and finds life insupportable, unable to find human help from any quarter; but this person too is instructed by this blessed author in the

3. Jer 8.4.

5. Ps 42.5-6.

7. Ps 49.16-17.

4. Ezek 18.23 in a LXX variant.

6. Ps 55.22.

midst of such terrible difficulties not to take refuge in human resource—listen, after all, to his words, “While I remembered them in prayer, they spoke calumnies against me.”⁸ Do you see from what source he looks for assistance? Other people, he is saying, concoct schemes and calumnies and plots, whereas I take refuge in the unassailable rampart, in the firm anchor, in the haven waves cannot threaten—that is, in prayer, by means of which all difficulties are made light and easy for me.

(3) Still another is despised and scorned by those who formerly cultivated him, and is deserted by his friends, and this worries him and disturbs his peace of mind. This person, too, however, will hear the words of this blessed author, provided he is willing and approaches this source, “My friends and neighbors came and took a position against me, those close to me kept their distance; those bent on taking my life did violence to me, those intending evil against me talked sweet nothings but had their mind on trickery all the day.”⁹ Do you see them concocting schemes to the very death and declaring war to the finish? In other words, the phrase, “all the day,” means all during life. So what was he doing while they were scheming and plotting these things? “I, however,” he says, “am like a deaf person, I do not hear, and am like [262] a mute not opening his mouth; I became like one who does not hear and has no reproof on his lips.”¹⁰ Do you see the extraordinary degree of his wisdom, how he survived difficult ways? While his opponents were concocting schemes, he even blocked his ears so as not to hear; while they at no time ceased sharpening their tongue and uttering gossip and lies, he checked their folly with his silence. Why did he cast himself in this role, giving the impression of being a deaf mute with neither ears nor tongue, especially as they were plotting these stratagems? Listen to his explanation for such wisdom: “Because I had placed my hope in you, Lord.”¹¹ Because I depended on my hope in you, he is saying, it was of no inter-

8. Ps 109.4.

10. Ps 38.13–14.

9. Ps 38.11–12 LXX.

11. Ps 38.16.

est to me what was done by them: your grace is sufficient to undermine all that, to render their plots and schemes futile, and to allow none of the plans hatched by them to take effect.

(4) Do you see how it is possible to find in Scripture a remedy appropriate to every trouble afflicting the human race and go off healed, to dispel every depression that life causes and not be brought low by any circumstance befalling us? For this reason I beseech you to make your way here frequently, and attend carefully to the reading of the Holy Scriptures, not only while you are present here but also at home by taking the sacred books in your hand and receiving the benefit of their contents with assiduity. Great, you see, is the advantage accruing from this: first, this very fact of the tongue's being brought to reform through reading; then the soul too is given wings and becomes elevated, glowing with the light of the Sun of Justice, freed at that time from the harm of evil thoughts and enjoying great peace and tranquility. What bodily nourishment is for the maintenance of our strength, reading is for the soul. You see, its nourishment is spiritual, and it both invigorates the mind and makes the soul strong, better attuned and wiser, no longer allowing it to fall victim to irrational impulses but even rendering its wings light and transferring it to heaven itself, so to say.

(5) Accordingly, let us not neglect such a great advantage, I beseech you; instead, let us show all zeal in attending to the reading of the holy Scriptures in our home as well, and when we come along here let us not waste our time in gossip and idle talk, but rather respect the purpose for which we have come, by rousing ourselves and heeding what is being read so that we may gain greater advantage and so take our leave from here. If the chances were that in coming here you would further waste your time in idle and unprofitable conversation and wend your way home after receiving no further benefit from the spoken word, what would be the good of that? I mean, how could it be other than illogical if, on the one hand, we went off to a secular festival and were enthusiastic about gaining everything possible from the festival before heading home, and had spent our money on this while, on the other

hand, when we come here we show no enthusiasm about gaining any advantage or paying attention to our soul before departing, especially as there is no call to be involved in expense but only to bring an eagerness and attentive attitude? Lest, therefore, we prove worse than people attending secular festivals, let us be zealous to give evidence of careful attention and alertness [263] so as to take away with us as we go from here food for the journey; thus we shall not only manage for ourselves but also be of assistance to others and be in a position to direct our wife, our household, our neighbors, our friends and even our enemies. Spiritual teachings, you see, are like that: matters applicable to everyone are proposed, nor is any distinction made in them except in so far as one person brings an attentive mind to the task and outdoes his neighbor in fervent enthusiasm.

(6) Since, therefore, the benefit accruing from the present teachings also is so considerable, come now, let us put before you the text we have read, reap the benefit arising from it, and thus make our way home. "Noe, first tiller of the soil," the text goes on, "planted a vineyard. He drank some wine and got drunk." Notice how the very beginning of this reading proves to be an occasion of much benefit to us. You see, whenever we hear that this just man, perfect though he was and recipient of testimony from on high, drank wine and got drunk, how much zeal should we now show, immersed as we are in such terrible sins of all kinds, in shunning the harm that comes from drunkenness? And yet this just man's becoming victim of this vice is not the same thing as our falling into the same habit: there are many factors that suggest this good man deserves forgiveness. I say this not to defend drunkenness but to show that the just man came to grief not through intemperance but rather from ignorance. For proof that it was not out of rashness that he got to know how to drink wine, listen to the very words of Scripture, which also offer an excuse in the expressions used. "Noe, first tiller of the soil," the text says, "planted a vineyard. He drank some wine and got drunk." That very word "first" shows that he made the first discovery of wine drinking, and through ig-

norance and inexperience of the proper amount to drink fell into a drunken stupor. This is not the only relevant factor; being also in the grip of deep depression he wanted to derive from this indulgence consolation for himself, as a sage also has said, "Let people in distress have wine and those in pain strong drink,"¹² which shows that nothing can prove such a good remedy for depression as recourse to this, aside from the fact that in some cases intemperance undermines the benefit coming from it. Who can deny that this just man was deeply distressed to see himself so isolated, people's bodies strewn about before his eyes and the one tomb serving them as well as cattle and wild animals?

(7) It is, after all, the practice of the prophets and the just to grieve not only for themselves but for the rest of mankind. If you're inclined to check that, you will find them all giving evidence of this compassion—for example, you can listen to Isaiah's words, "Don't put yourself out to comfort me for the destruction of the daughter of my people";¹³ or Jeremiah, on the other hand, "Who will pour water on my head, and provide a fountain of tears for my eyes?"¹⁴ or Ezekiel, "Alas, Lord, will you destroy what remains of Israel?"¹⁵ or Daniel lamenting in these words, "You have made us few in number by comparison with the gentiles";¹⁶ or Amos, "Think better of this, Lord";¹⁷ or Habakkuk, "Why do you show me pain and trouble?"¹⁸ and again, "You will make people like the fish of the sea."¹⁹ You can even listen to the words of this blessed author Moses himself: "If you forgive them their sin, do so; but if not, wipe me out also";²⁰ and again when God promised to entrust him with responsibility [264] for a greater nation in the words, "Let me be: I will destroy this people and make you into a great nation,"²¹ Moses did not choose this alter-

12. Prov 31.6.

13. Isa 22.4.

14. Jer 8.23 LXX.

15. Ezek 9.8.

16. Does Chrysostom have in mind Dan 3.37 in the LXX?

17. Amos 7.3 LXX.

18. Hab 1.3.

19. Hab 1.14, where the future sense is otiose and not reproduced in modern versions.

20. Exod 32.32.

21. A paraphrase of Exod 32.10.

native, considering instead command over them preferable. The world's teacher, blessed Paul, too said, "I would wish myself to be lost to Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race."²²

(8) Do you see how each of the just demonstrated great compassion for his fellows? Now consider in the situation of this just man, too, how much it was likely he was experiencing and how he was overcome with depression to see both the intensity of the awful solitude, and the earth itself, which previously had been bedecked with numerous plants and beautified with flowers, and now suddenly like plucked foliage turned out to be bare and empty. So, since the intensity of his depression was so profound through finding little encouragement for himself in his situation, he gave himself up to cultivation of the soil—hence the text says, "Noe, first tiller of the soil, planted a vineyard."

(9) It is worth enquiring, however, whether he personally invented the growing of crops at this stage, or if this was the result of creation right from the very outset. While it is likely that this was created right from the very outset on the sixth day, when "God saw all that he had made, and lo, it was very good"²³ ("God," the text says, remember, "rested on the seventh day from all the works he had done"²⁴), yet the usefulness of crop-growing was hardly known. You see, if crop-growing had been known right from the very outset, or its produce obvious, doubtless Abel would have made a libation of wine as well in making his offerings. But as ignorance still prevailed regarding the use of produce, they did not take advantage of crop-growing. Noe, however, being inventive in regard to farming, and given to great industry, probably tasted even the fruit, pressed some bunches of grapes, made wine and had a draught of it. Since he had neither tasted it before, nor knew anyone else who had partaken of it, he didn't know how much he should take nor the manner in

22. Rom 9.3. Chrysostom is finding it difficult to stay with the day's reading, and has indulged in a lengthy introduction and digression, assembling a vast mosaic of biblical texts.

23. Gen 1.31.

24. Gen 2.2.

which to take a share and so, through ignorance he was surprised into drunkenness. A further reason, however, was that since a carnivorous diet had been introduced into life, now wine drinking was, too. But notice, dearly beloved, how little by little the organization of the universe is provided for, each person proving to be an inventor of some skill from the beginning under the influence of intelligence from God implanted in nature; in this way he introduced practice of skills into life. The first man, remember, invented cultivation of the soil; after him one invented the tending of flocks, another the raising of cattle, one music, another metalwork; this just man, on the other hand, devised vinedressing from the instruction implanted in his nature. "Noe, first tiller of the soil, planted a vineyard. He drank some wine and got drunk." Notice how the remedy for depression, the restorative for his health, when through ignorance he went to excess, not only did not help him, but even harmed his constitution.

(10) [265] Perhaps, on the other hand, someone might say, Why was vinedressing, source of such terrible wickedness, introduced into life? Don't idly blurt out what comes into your head, o man: vinedressing is not wicked nor is wine evil—rather, it is use of them beyond the norm. You see, dreadful sins arise not from wine but from one's depraved attitude and through undermining the benefit that should naturally come from it because of intemperance. The reason that now after the deluge he shows you the use of wine is that you may learn that before using wine the human race had both come to grief in unbridled licentiousness and given evidence of extremity of sinfulness before wine had even appeared. This was also that, when you see the way wine is used, you would not attribute it all to wine but to the depraved intention bent on evil. Consider especially where wine has proved useful, and tremble, o man: in this consideration the basis of the good things involved in our salvation is worked out. Those who have an insight into spiritual realities understand this saying.

(11) "Noe, first tiller of the soil, planted a vineyard. He drank some wine and got drunk, and lay naked in his dwell-

ing." A terrible thing, you see, dearly beloved, a terrible thing is drunkenness, capable of dulling the senses and drowning the mind: man, rational and entrusted with responsibility for all creatures though he is, is thus shackled with unbreakable bonds and brought low like a motionless corpse. Worse in fact than a corpse: a corpse happens to be incapable of either good or evil, while the inebriate is incapable of good but more capable of evil; he lies there, an object of ridicule to all alike—wife, children, even the neighbors. I mean, whereas one's friends consider their own shame and hide their head in embarrassment, one's enemies on the contrary gloat over it and pour out ridicule and curses, as if uttering these words: has that fellow the right to draw breath? Beast! Pig!—and even harsher words than that. Inebriates, you see, are worse off than men returning from war with bloodstained hands and themselves on stretchers: such men are perhaps praised by many people on account of their spoils, their victories, their wounds and their bloody exploits, whereas inebriates are declared wretched, branded as despicable, and made the object of countless insults. After all, what could be more despicable than the person addicted to drink, reeking of it to high heaven day in day out, having lost the judgment of reason? Hence the warning of some sage, "Human life begins with bread and water, clothing and a dwelling to cover one's ugliness,"²⁵ so that even if one falls a victim to drunkenness, one does not make a public spectacle of oneself but is kept out of sight by one's friends and not left to be an object of mockery and ridicule for everyone.

(12) "Noe, first tiller of the soil, planted a vineyard," the text says. "He drank some wine, and got drunk." The word for drunkenness, dearly beloved, is not always used in Sacred Scripture for that failing only, but also for satiety. So you could say about this just man that, far from falling victim to drunkenness through intemperance, he was brought into that condition through satiety. Listen, after all, to David's words: "They will become intoxicated from the richness of your

25. Sir 29.21.

house"²⁶—that is, they will be filled. On the other hand, those who give themselves up to drunkenness never have their fill; the more wine they imbibe, the more they burn with thirst, and indulgence proves to be a constant fuelling of their thirst; by the time all that remains of the pleasure [266] has disappeared, the thirst proves to be unquenchable and leads the victims of drunkenness to the very precipice.

(13) "He planted a vineyard," the text says; "he drank some wine, got drunk and lay naked in his dwelling." See this happening to him, not somewhere out in the open, but in his dwelling. The reason Sacred Scripture indicated to us that it was "in his dwelling" was that you might see from the sequel the gravity of the wickedness of the one who drew attention to his nakedness. "Cham, the father of Canaan," the text goes on, "saw their father's nakedness; he went out and told his two brothers outside about it."²⁷ Perhaps if there had been others present, he would have mentioned his father's predicament to them too—such was the son's depravity. You see, for the reason that you might learn that right from the very beginning he was corrupt in attitude, it was not by chance that Scripture said that Cham saw his father's nakedness. Instead, why? "Cham, the father of Canaan, saw." Why, tell me, does he mention his son's name at this point too? For you to learn that he was intemperate and incontinent, and with the same inclination with which he gave himself to procreation in such a terrible situation, he now vented his insolence on his father.

(14) "He went out," the text says, "and told his two brothers outside." Notice, I ask you, in this case, dearly beloved, how his evil behavior is rooted not in human nature but in his attitude and inclination; they had the same nature, notice, they were brothers and had the same father, were born of the same pangs, fell under the same parental care, and yet did not betray the same inclinations: whereas one plunged headlong into evil, the others abided by their duty of respect for their father. Perhaps, however, in mocking and ridiculing his father's predicament he drew attention to it without heeding

26. Ps 36.8.

27. Gen 9.22.

the words of some sage, "Don't seek notoriety from your father's dishonor."²⁸ Yet his brothers didn't behave that way; instead, what? On hearing this, "Shem and Japheth took a cloak, put it on both their backs, went in backwards and covered their father's nakedness; with their faces turned away they did not see their father's nakedness."²⁹ Do you see these sons' right attitude? While one drew attention to it, the others refrained even from looking at it; instead, they moved with gaze averted so that they might do the right thing by covering their father's nakedness. Notice also their restraint as well as their right attitude: they neither railed at him nor upbraided him but, when they heard his words, they made it their one concern to right the situation speedily and give evidence of behavior directed at respecting their father. "With their faces turned away," the text says, "they did not see their father's nakedness." Great was the sons' respect, and this is shown to us not only through their act of covering their father but also through their not bearing to see him.

(15) Accordingly, let us learn from this case also and gain from both instances by imitating the latter two sons and shunning the example of the former. After all, if the man who drew attention to obvious nakedness rendered himself liable to a curse and by forfeiting the respect he shared with his brothers was condemned to serve them (if not himself in person, at least all his offspring), what fate awaits those who draw attention to the sins of their brethren, not merely not concealing them but even making them more conspicuous and by this means blowing the sins up out of all proportion? You see, whenever you publicize a brother's fault, you not only make him more shameless and perhaps more lethargic in his progress towards virtue, but you also render the listeners more indifferent and encourage [267] them in their sloth—and not merely this, but also the fact that you are responsible for God being blasphemed. Still, no one is unaware how heavy the punishment this brings those who are responsible. So let us, I beg you, avoid Cham's example, and instead imi-

28. Sir 3.10.

29. Gen 9.23.

tate the sense of shame shown by these respectful sons in regard to their father's nakedness; let us in that fashion keep under cover our brethren's sins, not for the purpose of encouraging them to indifference but that we may thereby in particular provide them with an even better occasion of ridding themselves promptly of that terrible affliction and of returning to the path of virtue. You see, just as such return is rendered easier for a sober person by the fact of having not many witnesses of his private failings, so when a person has passed the point of blushing and sees that the whole world knows him to be guilty of evil, it is not easy for him to reform; instead, like someone falling into the depths, submerged under countless waves, he will have greater difficulty in managing to emerge, but rather then sinks into despair and gives up the effort to return.

(16) Hence, I beseech you, let us not draw attention to our neighbors' faults; should we learn about them from others, far from being anxious to see their nakedness, let us rather, like the rightminded sons, conceal them, cover them up, strive to raise the fallen person by exhortation and advice, instructing him in the magnitude of God's love, the extraordinary degree of his goodness, his boundless compassion, so that like them we may enjoy greater commendation from the God of all, who wants "all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of truth,"³⁰ who wants not so much "the death of the sinner as his conversion to life."³¹ "They did not see their father's nakedness," the text says. See how right from the very beginning they fulfilled these obligations from the law innate in their nature and thus anticipated their imposition in the law drafted for the instruction of the human race, as is legislated for in the words, "Honor your father and your mother, that it may be well with you,"³² and, "Whoever reviles father or mother is to be put to death";³³ this had already been fulfilled in their behavior. Do you see how nature had in anticipation arrived at adequate instruction?

30. 1 Tim 2.4.

32. Exod 20.12.

31. Cf. Ezek 18.23.

33. Exod 21.17.

(17) "Noe, however, came out of his drunken sleep," the text goes on, "and got to know what his youngest son had done to him."³⁴ "Noe, however, came out of it," it says. Let those who spend their life in their cups heed the gravity of the error, and let them avoid the harm that comes from drunkenness. "Noe, however, came out of it," the text says. What is meant by "he came out of it"? What we usually say of the possessed when they are in a fit, that so and so came out of the demon and was freed from his tyranny, this too is what Scripture implied in the present instance. I mean, voluntary intoxication is really a demon, clouding the intellect more severely than any demon, and robbing its victim of any sense of values. You see, whereas we frequently have pity on the possessed person when we see him, we react quite differently to the drunk: we show anger and annoyance, and heap curses on him. Why on earth do we do that? Because, whereas the wicked demon's victim [268] involuntarily does what he does, whether it be kicking, or tearing garments, or screaming certain insults, and deserves excuse, the drunk, on the other hand, does not deserve excuse, no matter what he does; instead, he finds in family, friends and neighbors harsh accusers on the score that willingly and of his own accord he adopted evil ways and surrendered himself to the tyranny of drunkenness. I say this, not for the sake of condemning the just man: there were many grounds for conceding him excuse, most of all his never falling into the same faults again, which would be the clearest sign that in his former sin he was a victim not of indifference but of ignorance. After all, had he been a victim of indifference, it would surely have been inevitable for him to be ensnared by that passion again.

(18) I mean, had he fallen victim to the same fault, far from keeping silent, Scripture would have let us know about it. You see, Sacred Scripture has one purpose and goal, to pass over no detail of events but rather to instruct us in them truthfully: it is neither moved by envy to pass over the virtues of good people, nor by charity to cloud over their sins like-

34. Gen 9.24.

wise; instead, it brings everything to our notice so that we may have some record and instruction, and so that, should we in turn fall victim to some fault, we may be careful never to fall into the same fault again. I mean, the fact of sinning is not so harmful as persisting in sin. So don't take notice of the fact that the good man got drunk but that this didn't happen to him again. Pay attention, I ask you, on the contrary to those who waste their days in taverns and die a daily death, I could almost say; when they come to, they don't then avoid the harm coming from that practice but dedicate themselves to it as though to some task or exploit. Furthermore, however, you would keep in mind also the fact, this just man, even if drinking and becoming intoxicated through inexperience and ignorance of the due amount to imbibe, nevertheless was a good person with much virtuous behavior to his credit, and so could have kept under cover the sin that occurred by accident; in our case, on the other hand, beset as we are with countless other passions, what comfort could we gain for ourselves, tell me, when we sink ourselves in drunken stupor along with those other sins? Who would allow us excuse when we have not even come to our senses through experience?

(19) "Noe, however, came out of his drunken sleep," the text says, "and got to know of what his youngest son had done to him." What is meant by "what he had done"? It refers to something grave and intolerable. After all, keep in mind that having espied within the house his father's predicament, he ought to have kept it quiet, but instead he went out and bruited it abroad, making a laughing stock of his father as far as he could in his shameful intent. Whereas he should have called them inside the house if he was bent on reporting his father's nakedness and have blurted it out that way, instead he went outside and blurted it out, with the result that, had there been a crowd of other people there, he would have made them as well witnesses of his father's predicament. That is why the text says, "what he had done"—namely, he demonstrated that disrespect towards his father, was unmindful of the respect due from children for their parents, drew at-

tention to sins, wanted to suborn his brothers and make them join him in his disrespect. "What his youngest son had done to him," the text says. Actually, he wasn't the youngest: he was the second, ahead of Japheth; still, even if he was ahead of him [269] in age, yet he was more juvenile in his attitude, rashness demoting him in order. That is to say, since he wasn't prepared to respect the limits of his position, he lost the precedence conferred on him by nature: just as through the depravity of his inclination he surrendered what he possessed by nature, Japheth through his sound attitude acquired what he did not possess by nature.

(20) Do you see how you can find nothing in Sacred Scripture that is contained accidentally or by chance? "What his youngest son had done to him," the text says. "He said, 'Cursed be Canaan: he shall be a menial slave to his brothers.'"³⁵ Lo, we have come to the question mooted on all sides: you can hear lots of people asking, Why is it that, though the father was at fault in publicizing his parent's nakedness, it is the son who bears the curse? I beseech you, then, listen carefully and heed the solution of the problem: we will tell you whatever divine grace provides with your salvation in mind. "He said, 'Cursed be Canaan: he shall be a menial slave to his brothers.'" It was not idly or to no purpose that he made mention of the son but for some hidden reason: it was his intention both to curse him for the sin of disrespect he had committed against him and at the same time not to undermine the blessing already bestowed by God, the text reading, remember, "God blessed Noe when he disembarked from the ark and his sons as well."³⁶ So, in case it should seem he had cursed the man who had once fallen under God's blessing, for the time being he omitted mention of the disrespectful one while applying the curse to his son.³⁷

(21) To be sure, someone will say, while this shows that the

35. Gen 9.25.

36. Cf. Gen 9.1.

37. Chrysostom seems to be shifting the basis of his explanation of this difficulty compared with Homily 28; n. 12 there contrasts his other, moral explanation with the dogmatic and literary explanations of modern commentators.

reason he did not curse Cham was that he had enjoyed blessing from God, nevertheless why is it that, though he was the sinner, the other man had to pay the penalty? This doesn't happen idly, either: Cham did not endure less punishment than his son, he too felt its effects. You know well, of course, how in many cases fathers have begged to endure punishment in place of their children, and how seeing their children bearing punishment proves a more grievous form of chastisement than being subject to it themselves. Accordingly, this incident occurred so that Cham should endure greater anguish on account of his natural affection, so that God's blessing should continue without impairment, and so that his son in being the object of the curse should atone for his own sins. You see, even if in the present instance he bears the curse on account of his father's sin, nevertheless it was likely that he was atoning for his own failings. In other words, it was not only for his father's sin that he bore the curse but perhaps also for the purpose of his suffering a heavier penalty on his own account. After all, for proof that parents are not punished for their children, nor children for their parents, each being liable for the sins he has committed, you can find frequent statement among the inspired authors—as, for instance, when they say, "The teeth of the one eating sour grapes shall be set on edge,"³⁸ and, "The soul that shall die is the soul that sins,"³⁹ and again, "Parents shall not die for their children, nor children for their parents."⁴⁰

(22) Accordingly, let none of you, I beseech you, be ignorant of Sacred Scripture's point and be rash enough to find fault with what is written; instead, accept its words with a grateful mind, marvel at the precision of Sacred Scripture, and consider the grave evil sin is. I mean, behold the man sharing the same birth pangs as his brothers, born of the same womb, [270] yet made their slave by the onset of sin, robbed of his freedom and brought into subjection—hence

38. Jer 31.30, which is found at 38.30 in the LXX.

39. Ezek 18.20.

40. Deut 24.16. Again a series of scriptural testimonies support Chrysostom's moral point.

the origin of his subsequent condition of servitude. Before this, you see, there was no such indulgence, people being pampered in this way and needing others to minister to their needs; rather, each one looked to his own needs, there being great equality of esteem and complete absence of discrimination. When sin entered the scene, on the contrary, it impaired freedom, destroyed the worth inherent in nature and introduced servitude so as to provide constant instruction and reminder to the human race to shun the servitude of sin while returning to the freedom of virtue. You see, for the fact that servant and master both stand to gain benefit arising from this incident, provided they are willing, let them give due thought—the servant, on the one hand, to the fact that he entered servitude for the reason that Cham rushed headlong into such impertinence, while the master in turn should consider that servitude and command arose from no other source than Cham's display of a depraved intention and his fall from the equal esteem he enjoyed with his brothers.

(23) If, however, we are on the alert, these evils that came into life as a result of the sins of our forebears will in no way be able to harm us, going no further than the level of terminology, as they do. While it was the first formed human being who through the Fall brought on the punishment of death and was responsible for spending his life in pain and distress, and it was he who was the cause of servitude, Christ the Lord on the contrary came and permitted all these evils to occur only at the level of terminology, provided we are of the right mind. You see, death is now not death but only carries the name of death—or, rather, even the very name has been abolished. I mean, we no longer call it death, but sleeping and dreaming. Hence Christ himself said, “‘Our friend Lazarus is asleep.’”⁴¹ and Paul, writing to the Thessalonians said, “About those who are asleep, brethren, I don't want you to be ignorant.”⁴² Servitude in turn is likewise only a name: the one who commits sin is a slave. For proof that Christ came to remove it and left it existing only at the level of terminology,

41. John 11.11.

42. 1 Thes 4.13.

or rather even cancelled its very name, listen to Paul's words: "But those who have believers for master should not show them less respect because they are brethren."⁴³ Do you see how the advent of virtue caused those previously subject to the brand of slavery to be brought into the kinship of brotherhood?

(24) The text reads, "'Canaan shall be a menial slave to his brothers.'" You did not exercise your position properly, he is saying, nor have you gained any advantage from your parity of esteem; hence I intend you to come to your senses through subjection. This had happened also in the beginning in the case of the woman: though of equal status with her husband, she did not exercise well the position given her, and consequently she had her authority removed and heard the words, "'Your yearning will be for your husband, and he will be your master.'"⁴⁴ Since you do not know how to exercise control well, learn to be controlled well rather than controlling badly. This, of course, was the reason the character in the present incident also receives the punishment with a view to his coming to his senses and he personally suffers the penalty through his son, so that you may learn that, even if he was then elderly, nevertheless the penalty would be passed on to his son—something that made his life bitter and painful as he pondered the fact that after his own death his son was due to pay the penalty for his doings. [271] I mean, for proof that the son's life was inherently depraved and all his successors proved to be abominable in their decline into evil, listen to Scripture's words in the form of a curse: "Your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite;"⁴⁵ likewise someone else's taunt, "You offspring of Canaan and not of Juda."⁴⁶

(25) You see, it is now worth hearing, on the other hand, following the punishment inflicted on the one who drew attention to his father's nakedness, what rewards were bestowed on those who accorded their father such respect and defer-

43. 1 Tim 6.2.

44. Gen 3.16.

45. Ezek 16.3, Chrysostom strangely omitting the pointed opening of the jibe, "Your origins are from the land of Canaan."

46. Dan 13.56.

ence. "Noe said," the text goes on, "'Blessed be the Lord the God of Shem, whose slave Canaan shall be.'"⁴⁷ This, someone may perhaps say, is not a blessing of Shem. His being blessed is in fact deliberate: whenever God is thanked and blessed through human beings, then it is usual that more ample blessing falls on those through whom God is blessed. Accordingly, in blessing God he made Shem beneficiary of greater blessing and became the cause of richer reward for him than if he had bestowed the blessing on himself.⁴⁸ In other words, just as he grants us generous favors from himself when he is blessed through us, so likewise when through us other people blaspheme against him our condemnation proves to be greater on that account for providing the occasion. Accordingly, let us be anxious, I beseech you, to live in such a manner and give evidence of such intensity of virtue that all who see us will raise hymns of blessing to the Lord God. You see, good and loving as he is, he wants to be praised through our instrumentality, not because he personally expends any effort with a view to his own glory, being protected against need as he is; instead, his purpose is that we may provide him with occasions for granting us greater favor from himself. "'Blessed be the Lord the God of Shem, whose slave Canaan shall be.'"⁴⁹ Do you see how the paternal chastisement is shown to be more a reprimand than chastisement? Noe was a father, after all, and a loving father at that, and he had no wish to inflict the due penalty but rather to stop the evil from going further. For this reason, he says, I sentence you to servitude so that you may have a constant and ineluctable reminder.

(26) Then he says, "'May God enlarge Japheth's territory, may he dwell in the tents of Shem, and let Canaan be their slave.'"⁴⁹ Once again a wonderful eulogy this, containing perhaps some treasure below the surface. I mean, if it was not idly or to no purpose that his father imposed his name on

47. Gen 9.26.

48. If Chrysostom's argumentation seems convoluted, he is doing no worse than modern commentators like Von Rad and Speiser, who at least, like Chrysostom, resist the temptation to alter the difficult text.

49. Gen 9.27.

Noe but rather to foretell by means of the name the deluge due to occur, far less was it idly or by chance that this good man bestowed his blessings. In other words, through these blessings, Shem's and Japheth's, I am inclined to think he is suggesting the calling of the two peoples—through Shem the Jews, on the one hand, the patriarch Abraham coming from him, after all, whence the Jewish race developed, whereas through Japheth, on the other hand, came the calling of the gentiles. Notice, after all, that this blessing foretells as much. “May God enlarge Japheth's territory,” the text says, remember, “May he dwell in the tents of Shem.” We see this fulfilled in the case of the gentiles; while, on the one hand, he refers to all the gentiles in the phrase, “May he enlarge the territory,” on the other hand, through the words, “May he dwell in the tents of Shem,” he means that the gentiles were in possession of things prepared for the Jews and provided for them. “Let Canaan be their slave.”

(27) Do you see how great were the rewards the former received for their rightmindedness, [272] and the extent of the disrespect the latter flaunted about by means of his indiscretion? Let us constantly have this graven on our minds so that we may, on the one hand, succeed in becoming careful imitators of the former while, on the other hand, we may avoid the latter's depravity of attitude and extraordinary indiscretion.

(28) The text continues, “Noe lived three hundred and fifty years after the deluge. Noe died after a lifespan of nine hundred and fifty years.”⁵⁰ Don't think, however, that Sacred Scripture indicated this to no purpose; rather, notice in this instance as well the good man's continence in the fact that, through enjoying security and prosperity, and attaining such a long life after disembarking from the ark, he still refrained from procreation. Scripture, you observe, did not make mention of his having further children than these three. Take note likewise in this text of Cham's extreme intemperance in the fact that he did not even come to his senses by seeing his

50. Gen 9:28–29.

father's remarkable display of continence, but even did the exact opposite in everything to his father. Consequently and quite properly the whole race springing from him was sentenced to servitude so as to receive some check to this depraved attitude.

(29) Then Sacred Scripture goes on from this point to tell of the children born to the sons, in these words: "Now, Cham became the father of Chous"; and further, "Now, Chous became the father of Nebrod, who was the first on earth to be a mighty hero; he was a mighty hunter in the Lord's sight."⁵¹ While some people say the phrase, "in the Lord's sight," means being in opposition to God, I on the contrary do not think Sacred Scripture is implying this—rather that the person was strong and brave. But the phrase, "in the presence of the Lord God," means created by him, receiving from him God's blessing, or the fact that God was on the point of arousing our wonder through him by creating such a remarkable creature and displaying him before us on the earth. He too, however, in his turn in imitation of his forebear did not take due advantage of his natural preeminence but hit upon another form of servitude in endeavoring to become ruler and king. You see, there wouldn't ever be a king unless there were people being ruled; but in that case freedom is seen for what it really is, whereas slavery is most galling in conditions of freedom, the more power is exercised over free people. See what ambition is guilty of: observe bodily strength not keeping to its limits but constantly lusting after more and clutching for glory. You see, the orders he gave were not those of a leader; rather, he even builds cities with a view to ruling over the enemy.

51. Gen 10.6, 8–9. Despite his protestation elsewhere about the relevance of genealogies from the viewpoint of his beloved *akribeia* (Hom. 2 in *Oziam*; PG 56, 110), Chrysostom now, as if suddenly aware of the amount of attention he has lavished on Noe and his family (nine homilies), rushes ahead and even truncates his habitual moral conclusion, all unaware of the importance given to this Table of Nations by modern commentators like Von Rad, who sees it as "a document of amazing theoretical power. . . . For Biblical theology the inclusion of the table of nations means a radical break with myth" (*Genesis*, pp. 143, 145).

(30) "From that land came Assur," the text goes on, remember, "and he built Nineveh."⁵² Notice further in this text, I ask you, how the wickedness of forebears does not leave its mark on our nature: these Ninevites, who won God's mercy through their repentance and cancelled the Lord's sentence, had as ancestor that parricide Cham, then that tyrannical and arrogant person Nebrod as kin, from whom came Assur. On the other hand, it is said there were perhaps others among them who were soft and pampered, leading a decadent and corrupt life, abandoning themselves to intoxication, ribaldry, revelry and jesting—yet since they were determined to give evidence of an exact repentance, the wickedness of their forebears [273] left no mark on them. Instead, they won such great favor from on high that up to this day the practice of their repentance is celebrated.

(31) Accordingly, let us too imitate them and learn that our forebears' wickedness does not leave its mark on us, provided we are ready to be on the alert, nor can our forebears' virtue be of any use to us if we are guilty of indifference. So let us show great zeal in embracing virtue and give evidence of a grateful attitude, so that we may enjoy the same blessing as Shem and Japheth and remain free from the curse and the servitude that Canaan incurred and not become slaves of sin. Instead, may we take advantage of the true freedom and come by those ineffable blessings, thanks to the grace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, power and honor, now and forever, for ages of ages. Amen.

52. Gen 10.11.

HOMILY 30

"The whole world had the same language, and everyone used the same words."¹



O, [273] AT LONG LAST we have reached the end of the holy season of Lent, we have completed the voyage of fasting and now, thanks to God's grace, we have put into port. Don't become careless on that account, however; instead, let that be an occasion for our giving evidence of so much the greater enthusiasm and vigilance. Navigators, too, when they are on the point of entering port after crossing countless seas, with full sails and cargo brought out of the hold, then most of all exercise great concern and anxiety lest the ship crash on to some reef or rock and render their previous trouble useless. Runners behave in this way, too; when they approach the end of the course, then most of all they exert their keenest effort so as to reach the finish-line and be awarded the prize. Prize-fighters as well, despite countless fights and victories, exert the greatest effort when they are wrestling for the prize so that they may win the purse and go home. So, just as navigators, runners and prize-fighters in each case stretch their enthusiasm and vigilance to the limit at the point when they are close to success, well, in just the same way ought we too, now that we have arrived at this great week, give thanks to God's grace, intensify the devotion of our prayers and give evidence of precise and thorough confession of sins, practice of good works, generous almsgiving, fair dealing, even-tempered behavior and every other virtue, so that we may arrive at the Lord's Day with these good deeds and thus enjoy the Master's generosity.

1. Gen 11.1. Chrysostom, with his moral purpose, is not likely to rush over this chapter as he did the Table of Nations.

(2) We call the week great, not because it has a greater number of hours—other weeks having many more hours, after all—nor because it has more days, there being the same number of days in this and the other weeks, of course. So why do we call this week great? Because in it many ineffable good things come our way: in it protracted war is concluded, death is eliminated, curses are lifted, [274] the devil's tyranny is relaxed, his pomps are despoiled, the reconciliation of God and man is achieved, heaven is made accessible, human beings are brought to resemble angels, those things which were at odds are united, the wall is laid low, the bar removed, the God of peace having brought peace to things on high and things on earth. This, then, is the reason we call the week great, because in it the Lord lavished on us such a plethora of gifts. This is the reason many people intensify their fasting as well as their sacred watching and vigils, and practice almsgiving, thus showing by their behavior the regard they have for the week. After all, since the Lord in this week has regaled us with such great goods, how are we too not obliged to demonstrate our reverence and regard as far as we can?

(3) Emperors, too, in fact, by their own action declare the extent of the reverence they have for these august days by ordering everyone involved in civic administration to suspend business, the doors of the courts to be closed and all kinds of strife and dispute to be eliminated so that we may have the chance to proceed to our spiritual duties in complete peace and quiet. And not only this: they also give evidence of further generosity by releasing from their chains those confined in prison, and thus imitating their Lord to the extent of human capacity. Just as he (as Scripture tells us) releases us from the harsh prison of our sins and offers us enjoyment of countless goods, in just the same way ought we to become imitators of the Lord's mercy as far as we can. Do you see how each of us demonstrates the reverence and regard we have for the days that have been made occasion of such great benefit for us? Hence I beseech you, now above all times let us dispel all worldly thoughts, keep the eye of our mind clear and alert, and in this fashion attend here; let no one come to

church cluttered up with worldly concerns if the purpose is to gain the due reward of our effort and thus go off home.

(4) So come now, let us spread before you the customary feast and regale your good selves with what we read before from blessed Moses by drawing to your attention the text itself just read and demonstrating the precision of Sacred Scripture. When it brought the story of Noe to a close, remember, it then began the genealogy starting with Shem in the words, "Sons were born to Shem, ancestor of all the sons of Eber and younger brother of Japheth."² Then, after giving the list of names, it says, "Two sons were born to Eber: the name of one was Phalek because in his time the earth was divided."³ Notice how by the naming of the child it gave a hint of the sign due to occur before long, so that when you see the event take place you will not be amazed now that you have previously seen the child's name foreshadowing it. You see, after it listed the children later born to these people, it adds, "The whole world had the same language, and everyone used the same words"⁴—referring not to the earth but to the human race, with the intention of teaching us that all mankind had the same language. "The whole world had the same language," it says, "and everyone used the same words." "Lips," literally meaning language, and "words" likewise has the same meaning, so that it is saying that everyone had the same language and idiom. For proof that the reference is to language [275] in the verse, "The whole world had the same language," listen to the words of Scripture elsewhere: "Venom of asps is on their lips."⁵ Scripture is accustomed to refer in this way to language by the word "lips."

(5) "When they travelled from the east, they found open country in the land of Sennar and settled there."⁶ Notice how the human race, instead of managing to keep to their own boundaries, always longs for more and reaches out for greater things. This is what the human race has lost in particular, not being prepared to recognize the limitations of their own con-

2. Gen 10.21 in Chrysostom's variant of the LXX.

3. Gen 10.25.

5. Ps 140.3.

4. Gen 11.1.

6. Gen 11.2.

dition but always lusting after more and entertaining ambitions beyond their capacity. In this regard, too, when people who chase after the things of the world acquire for themselves much wealth and status, they lose sight of their own nature, as it were, and aspire to such heights that they topple into the very depths. You could see this happening every day without others being any the wiser from the sight of it; instead, they pause for a while, but immediately lose all recollection of it and take the same road as the others and fall over the same precipice. This is exactly what you can see happening to these people in the present instance: "When they travelled from the east, they found open country in the land of Sennar and settled there." See how in gradual stages it teaches us the instability of their attitude: when they saw the open country (the text says), they packed up and left their previous dwelling and settled down there.

(6) Then it says, "Each one said to his neighbor, 'Come, let us make bricks and bake them in the oven.' Brick acted as stone for them, and their mortar was bitumen. They said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its peak reaching to heaven; let us make a name for ourselves lest we be scattered over the whole earth.'"⁷ See how they failed to take proper advantage of their common language, their vain plan for this life proving the source of their troubles. "'Come,'" the text says, "'let us make bricks and bake them in the oven.' Brick acted as stone for them and their mortar was bitumen." Notice how much security they wanted to be able to count on in their building, unaware that "unless the Lord build the house, in vain do its builders labor."⁸ "'Let us build a city for ourselves,'" the text says—not for God but "'for ourselves.'" See the intensity of their wickedness: despite having a fresh memory of that recent disaster, they fell into such terrible folly. "'Let us build ourselves a city,'" the text says, "'and a tower with its peak reaching to heaven.'" By the mention of heaven Sacred Scripture meant to bring to our attention the excess of their temerity. "'Let us make a

7. Gen 11.3-4.

8. Ps 127.1.

name for ourselves,'" the text says: do you see the root of their wickedness? So that we may enjoy an undying reputation, the meaning is, so that we may be in a position to be remembered in perpetuity; such will be our performance and achievement that we will never pass into oblivion. Let us do this "'lest we be scattered over the face of the whole earth.'"⁹ While we are still in this situation, the meaning is, let us put into effect what we have resolved, to leave an indelible memory for ourselves with succeeding generations.

(7) There are many people even today who in imitation of them want to be remembered for such achievements, by building splendid homes, baths, porches and avenues. I mean, if you were to ask each of them why they toil and labor and lay out such great expense [276] to no good purpose, you would hear nothing but these very words—so as to ensure their memory survives in perpetuity and to have it said that "this is the house belonging to so-and-so," "this the property of so-and-so." This, on the contrary, is worthy not of commemoration but of condemnation: hard upon those words come other remarks equivalent to countless accusations—"belonging to so-and-so the grasping miser, despoiler of widows and orphans." So such behavior is calculated not to earn remembrance but to encounter unremitting accusations, achieve notoriety after death, and incite the tongues of onlookers to calumny and condemnation of the person who acquired these goods. But if you're quite anxious for undying reputation, I will show you the way to succeed in being remembered for every achievement and also, along with an excellent name, to provide yourself with great confidence in the age to come. How, then, will you manage both to be remembered day after day and also become the recipient of tributes even after passing from one life to the next? If you give away these goods of yours into the hands of the poor, letting go of precious stones, magnificent homes, properties and baths. This is undying reputation, this remembrance proves for you provider

9. Chrysostom's text of vv. 3-4 at these places shows the variations that one would expect of a preacher's less than perfect recall.

of countless treasures, this remembrance relieves you of the burden of sins, and procures for you great confidence with the Lord. After all, consider, I ask you, even the very words everybody would be likely to say about the dispenser of such largesse—so generous and kind, so gentle and good. Scripture says, remember, “He distributed his goods as gifts to the poor; his righteousness lasts forever.”¹⁰ That, after all, is what material wealth is like: the more it is given away, the more it remains, whereas if it is clung to and locked up in safe keeping, it destroys even the people who cling to it. “He distributed his goods as gifts to the poor,” it says, remember. But listen to what follows as well: “His righteousness lasts forever.” It took one day for him to distribute his wealth, and his goodness continues for all time and earns an undying remembrance.

(8) Do you see reputation extending to the end of time? Do you see reputation accompanied by great and ineffable blessings? Let it therefore be our concern to be remembered for edifices of this kind. I mean, those made of stone, far from bringing us any advantage, even mock us more loudly than an imperishable memorial. Whereas we take our leave with the sins accruing from them upon us, the buildings themselves we leave here, nor do we win from them even the slightest reputation of any value; rather, we incur slander, while the title immediately passes to someone else. This, you see, is the way things are: property passes from one person to another, from him to someone else, and so on. Today the house is said to belong to so-and-so, tomorrow to somebody else, and later to someone else again. We deceive ourselves quite deliberately to think that we have complete ownership, unmindful that we enjoy only use of things and willy-nilly must pass them on to other people; the fact that these are people we would prefer not to have them, I will pass over for the time being. In short, though, if you long for remembrance, this is what you must concentrate on: listen to how the widows remembered Tabitha, and how they surround Pe-

10. Ps 112.9.

ter, weeping and showing him tunics and cloaks which Dorcas had made while she was with them. Do you see the buildings pulsing with life, emitting cries and possessed of such virtue as even to bring back from death to life? In fact, when they surrounded Peter and gave a vent to a flood of hot tears by way of begging for the means of subsistence, Peter (the text says) sent everyone outside and fell on his knees in prayer; then he raised her up, called the faithful [277] including the widows and set her in their midst as large as life.¹¹ If you want to be remembered and are anxious for true repute, imitate her, and build edifices like that, not going to expense on lifeless matter but displaying great generosity in regard to your fellow human beings. This is the remembrance that is worth admiring and brings great benefit.

(9) Let us, however, return once more to our theme and see the temerity of the men of that period; their vices, in fact, will prove a lesson for us, provided we are prepared to be on the alert. "Let us build a city for ourselves," the text says, "and a tower with its peak reaching to heaven; let us make a name for ourselves lest we be scattered over the earth." Do you see how in all cases they give evidence of the depravity of their attitude: "Let us build a city for ourselves." Notice, however, even after such a terrible disaster how they put their hand to evils that are no less grave. So what will happen? How will they be shaken loose of this folly? Out of fidelity to his characteristic love God promised never again to inflict a deluge; these people, on the contrary, were not brought to their senses even by his punishments nor were they improved by his kindnesses.

(10) Hence, listen to what follows so as to learn the magnitude of God's ineffable love. "The Lord God descended," the text goes on, "to see the city and the tower that the sons of men were building."¹² See how human a fashion Scripture uses in narration! "The Lord God descended," the text says—not for us to think in human fashion, but so that in this way

11. Cf. Acts 9.36–41.

12. Gen 11.5. The anthropomorphism prompts Chrysostom, as usual, to a warning of the true purpose of such "considerateness" in language.

we may be instructed never to condemn our brother idly nor convict them on hearsay unless we gain some clinching evidence beforehand. You see, this is the reason why everything happens, on God's part, and why he employs such wonderful considerateness with a view to the instruction of the human race. "The Lord God descended," the text says, "to see the city and the tower." Notice him not checking their folly at the outset but employing much longsuffering and waiting for them to put into effect all their wickedness, and only then thwarting their attempt. You see, lest anyone should be able to say that, while they had made plans, they had not put their designs into effect, he waits until they implemented their plans and only then shows them how vain their exploits are. "The Lord God descended," the text says, "to see the city and the tower that these creatures were building." See the excess of loving kindness: he let them toil and labor so that experience of these matters might prove a lesson for them.

(11) When he saw the wickedness developing and the disease intensifying, he did not allow it to reach its goal; instead, he revealed his characteristic goodness and, like an excellent doctor who sees the complaint becoming aggravated and the ulcer turning incurable, he performs an immediate excision so as to remove completely the source of the complaint. "The Lord God said," the text goes on, "'Lo, they are all of one race and tongue (that is, one language and one idiom). They have begun this exploit, and now they will leave undone none of the things they have planned to do.'"¹³ See the Lord's loving kindness: since he is on the point of putting a stop to their exploit, he first offers an explanation and, as it were, demonstrates the magnitude of their sin and the excess of their ingratitude, as well as the fact that they had abused their common language. "'Lo, they are all of one race and one tongue,'" the text says, remember. "They have begun this exploit, and [278] now they will leave undone none of the things they have planned to do.'" This, you see, is his custom, when he is on the point of inflicting punishment, to show first

13. Gen 11.6.

of all the magnitude of the sins as if offering an explanation, and only then to apply the corrective. In the case of the deluge, too, remember, when he was about to put into effect that awful threat of punishment, Scripture says, "Now, the Lord God saw that men's vices were multiplied, and everyone gave himself up wholly to pondering evil from his youth."¹⁴ Do you see how he first showed the excess of their wickedness, and only then says, "'I will destroy the human being'?"¹⁵ In like manner in this case too, "'Lo, they are all of one race and tongue, and have begun this exploit.'" If despite their advantage of such similarity of thought and language they rushed headlong into such awful folly, how would they avoid worse crimes with the passage of time? "'They will leave undone,'" the text says, remember, "'none of the things they have planned to do:'" nothing will succeed in checking their impulse—rather, they will be anxious to put into operation everything planned by them in case they should shortly be punished for things already perpetrated.

(12) You will find the same thing happening in the case of the first formed human: in that case, too, when God was on the point of expelling him from life in the garden, he said, "'Who told you that you are naked?'" and again, "'Lo, Adam has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now there is risk that at some time he may put out his hand and pick fruit from the tree of life, eat it and live forever.' The Lord God sent him out of the garden."¹⁶ In this case he says, "'Lo, they are all of one race and tongue. They have begun this exploit, and now they will leave undone none of the things they have planned to do. Come, let us go down there and confuse their speech, so that they will be unable to understand one another's language.'"¹⁷ Notice once again the considerateness of the expressions; "'Come,'" it says, "'let us go down.'" What is the force of these words? Does the Lord

14. Gen 6.5, Chrysostom quoting from memory and adding a phrase not found in his text in Homily 22, though his commentary there seems to suppose such an addition.

15. Gen 6.7.

16. Gen 3.11, 22–23.

17. Gen 11.6–7.

need assistance for making correction? or help in their destruction? No, not at all; on the contrary, just as Scripture had already said, "The Lord descended," to teach us through this means that he saw in precise detail the excess of their wickedness, in this text too in the same way it says, "'Come, let us go down.'" This remark, however, is made as if to those of equal status: "'Come, let us go down and confuse their speech, so that they will be unable to understand one another's language.'" Like an everlasting memorial, he says, I am setting in place for them such terrible punishment that would last forever and no length of time would suffice to bring them forgetfulness of it. In other words, since they abused their similarity of language, I intend them to come to their senses through their difference in language.

(13) This, in fact, is the way the Lord is accustomed to behave. This is what he did in the beginning in the case of the woman as well: she had abused the status conferred on her, and for that reason he subjected her to her husband. Again, too, in the case of Adam, since he drew no advantage from the great ease he enjoyed and from life in the garden, but rather rendered himself liable to punishment through the Fall, God drove him out of the garden and inflicted on him everlasting punishment in the words, "'Thorns and thistles let the earth yield you.'"¹⁸ So when the people in the present case, who had been dignified with similarity of language, used the privilege given them for evil purposes, he put a stop to the impulse of their wickedness through difference in language. "'Let us confuse their speech,'" he says, "'so that they will be unable to understand one another's language,'" his purpose being that, just as [279] similarity of language achieved their living together, so difference in language might cause dispersal among them. How could people lacking the same language and converse live in conformity with one another? "The Lord God dispersed them from there across the face of the whole earth, and they stopped building the city and the tower."¹⁹ See God's loving kindness in the extent of the help-

18. Gen 3.18.

19. Gen 11.8.

lessness to which he reduced them; from then on they resembled lunatics: when one gave a direction, another responded in different fashion. Hence "they stopped building the city and the tower. That is why it was given the name Confusion, because there it was that the Lord God confused the languages of the whole earth, and from there the Lord God dispersed them in all the earth."²⁰ Notice the extent of the action taken to ensure remembrance of it would last for all time: first the conflict of tongues, or rather prior to this the giving of the name—the name Phalek, remember, which Eber gave his son, means division. Next, the place name: the place was called Confusion, which is what Babylon means. Then, Eber kept the same language as he had had before, so that this too should prove an unmistakable sign of the conflict.²¹ Do you see how many means he wanted to use to keep the memory fresh and prevent the present event from being consigned to oblivion? You see, from that time on a father was obliged to tell his child the reason for the difference in languages, and a child would want to know the reason for the place name; the reason, of course, why the place was called Babylon, which means "confusion," was the fact that it was there that the Lord God confused the languages of the whole earth and from there he dispersed them. I think the place name implies both things, that he confused the languages and from there they felt the effects of dispersal.

(14) Dearly beloved, you have heard what gave rise to their dispersal and the conflict of tongues. Let us, I beseech you, avoid imitating them, and make proper use of advantages provided for us by God; let us have human nature in mind and keep our ambitions on the level that is proper for human beings, being mortal as we are. With our thoughts on the evanescence of this present life and how short is our time in

20. Gen 11.9. The LXX does not attempt to parallel the word play in the Hebrew on "Babylon," though Chrysostom shows his awareness of it.

21. This gratuitous comment of Chrysostom's gives rise to some perplexity in his editors. But perhaps Chrysostom is just stating, as do modern commentators, "Eber is the eponymous ancestor of the Hebrews" (Speiser, *Genesis*, 70).

this life, let us store up for ourselves abundant grounds for confidence through the performance of good deeds by giving evidence not only of the severity of our fasting in keeping with these days of Lent but also of the generosity of our almsgiving and our ardent prayers. Prayer, you see, ought always be joined to fasting. For the truth of this, listen to Christ's words, "This kind leaves only in response to prayer and fasting"²²; and again in the case of the apostles Scripture says, "With prayer and fasting they commended them to the Lord, in whom they were believers;"²³ the Apostle further says, "Don't deny each other, except in prayer and fasting."²⁴ Do you see how fasting needs help from this quarter? Then it is, you see, that prayers are raised with devotion, when the mind becomes more elevated, is burdened with nothing, and is encumbered by no evil weight of lechery. Prayer, in fact, is a wonderful shield, great security, a rich treasure, a mighty harbor, safe refuge, provided we approach the Lord with attention, [280] withdraw our mind from distraction on all sides and press our suit without allowing our soul's enemy any inroads. I mean, since he knows that at that time we have the power to discuss matters relevant to our good, confess our sins, show our wounds to the physician and come by efficacious healing, then it is especially that he goes on the offensive and tries every stratagem to trip us up and force us into indifference.

(15) Hence, I beg you, let us be on the alert, realize his wiles and at that time especially show so much zeal for driving him off as if we saw him before us with our own eyes, for expelling every thought that disturbs our peace of mind, and for devoting ourselves completely to raising attentive prayers so that not only the tongue may speak but also the mind may be in step with the words. I mean, if the tongue pronounces the words but the mind is miles away, busy with some domestic concerns and concentrating on other public affairs, we gain no advantage at all—instead we possibly incur greater

22. Matt 17.21.

23. Acts 14.23.

24. 1 Cor 7.5 elliptically.

condemnation. After all, if in our approach to a mere human being we display such concentration as frequently to have eyes for no others nearby, but concentrate our attention and fix our eyes on him alone, much more should we do this in the case of God and persevere in prayer unremittingly and without interruption. This, in fact, is the reason Paul wrote in these words, "With a prayer for every occasion let us pray in spirit."²⁵—not only in word and with untiring persistence, he says, but also in our very soul, "in spirit." In other words, let your requests be spiritual, he says, let your mind be alert, let your attention be concentrated on the words. Ask for the kind of things it is usual to ask of God so that you may gain what you ask; to the same end maintain your constant vigil, alert, keeping your attention undimmed, no yawning or switching your mind in one direction and another, but working out your salvation in fear and trembling. "Blessed is the person," Scripture says, remember, "whose piety puts him in awe of everything."²⁶

(16) Prayer is a great good: someone conversing with a virtuous person gains no little advantage from the experience, so how much good will the one communing with God be granted? Prayer, after all, is conversing with God. For proof of this, listen to the words of the inspired author: "Let my conversation be pleasing to God,"²⁷ that is, may my converse seem acceptable to God. I mean, he is able to offer help before we ask for it, isn't he? Still, he waits so as to take occasion from us for daily bestowing on us providential care from himself. Accordingly, whether we have our requests granted or not, let us persist in asking, and render thanks not only when we gain what we ask but also when we fail to. Failure to gain, you see, when that is what God wants, is not worse than succeeding; we do not know what is to our advantage in this regard in the way he does understand. The result is, then, that succeeding or failing we ought to give thanks. Why are you surprised that we don't know what is to our advantage?

25. Eph 6.18.

27. Ps 104.34.

26. Prov 28.14.

Paul, a man of such quality and stature, judged worthy of ineffable blessings, did not know what was advantageous in his requests: when he saw himself beset with trouble and diverse tribulations, he prayed to be rid of them, not once or twice but many times. "Thrice I besought the Lord,"²⁸ he says, remember. "Thrice" means he besought them frequently [281] without success. So let us see how he was affected by it: surely he didn't take it badly? He didn't turn fainthearted, did he? He didn't become dispirited, did he? Not at all. On the contrary, what? God said, "'My grace is sufficient for you; my power has its full effect in infirmity.'"²⁹ Not only did he not free him of the troubles besetting him, but he even allowed him to persevere in them. True enough; but how does it emerge that he did not take it badly? Listen to Paul's own words when he learnt what the Lord had decided: "I will gladly boast of my infirmities."³⁰ Not only, he says, do I no longer seek to be rid of them, but I even boast of them with greater satisfaction. Do you see his grateful spirit? Do you see his love for God? Listen to what he says: "You see, as for praying for what we ought, we are at a loss."³¹ It is not possible, he says, for us—human beings that we are—to have a precise knowledge of everything. So we ought yield to the Creator of our nature, and with joy and great relish accept those things that he has decided on, and have an eye not to the appearance of events but to the decisions of the Lord. After all, he who knows better than we what is for our benefit also knows what steps must be taken for our salvation.

(17) Accordingly, let it be our concern to persevere constantly in prayer and, far from being depressed by a slow response, let us give every sign of longsuffering. He postpones response to our requests not to deny us but with the intention of instructing us in the way of entreaty and out of a wish to draw us to him uninterruptedly. Likewise when a loving father is entreated many times by his child, he does not accede immediately—not from any unwillingness to give but

28. 2 Cor 12.8.

30. Ibid.

29. 2 Cor 12.9.

31. Rom 8.26.

to encourage the child's entreaty by this means. With this in mind, then, let us never give up our effort by desisting from our approach to him or from the entreaties we make. After all, if the woman's supplication got the better of that harsh, insensitive judge who had no respect even for God, and provoked him into assisting her,³² how much more can we provoke our Lord into assisting us if we are minded to imitate that woman, since he is so gentle and loving, so compassionate and caring for our salvation? Accordingly, let us condition ourselves to be not easily distracted from the task of assailing him constantly with our prayers day and night, and especially at night, when there is no one to hinder us, when there is great peace of mind, when there is complete repose, all hubbub left outside the house, no one likely to put us off or distract us from entreaty, when our mind happens to be set at rest and is able to propose everything precisely to the physician of souls. I mean, if blessed David, king as he was as well as inspired author and beset with so many worries, clad in mantle and crown, could say, "At midnight I rise to praise you for the rulings of your justice,"³³ what should we say who, despite leading a private and carefree life, don't even do the same as he? In other words, since by day he had much on his mind, a great mass of business, terrible confusion, and could not find a suitable time for the proper kind of prayer, the time of respite which others devote to sleep, lying on soft beds, tossing and turning; on the contrary the king, though caught up in such responsibility, devoted the time to prayer, conversing privately with God, directing sincere entreaties [282] to him of the most intense kind, and thus he achieved whatever he set his mind to: through these prayers he was successful in wars, inflicting defeat and adding victory to victory. He enjoyed, you see, an invincible weaponry, an ally from on high sufficient not merely for battles conducted by human beings, but also for the cohorts of the demons.

(18) So, let us in our turn imitate this man, the peasants the prince, we with our carefree and peaceful life the man in

32. Cf. Luke 18.2-5.

33. Ps 119.62.

mantle and crown, but still rivalling the lifestyle of monks. I mean, listen further to his words in another place, "My tears became my bread day and night."³⁴ Do you see his soul finding itself afflicted with unremitting remorse? My nourishment, he is saying, my bread, my food was nothing other than my tears by night and day. Again, "I am distressed with my groaning, I drench my bed with tears night after night."³⁵ What will we say for ourselves in our own defense, we who are reluctant to give evidence of the same degree of remorse as this king beset by so many affairs of state? What, after all, tell me, could be more comely than those eyes rendered so beautiful with the coursing of tears as if with some pearls? You have seen the king giving himself to tears and prayers both by night and by day; see, too, the world's teacher locked in prison and put into the stocks along with Silas, yet praying all night, in no way prevented from so doing either by the pain or by his bonds, but so much the more giving evidence of a more ardent love for God: "Paul and Silas," the text says, remember, "were praising God in the middle of the night."³⁶ David in his royal estate and kingly mantle spent all his life in tears and prayers; the Apostle, snatched to the third heaven, vouchsafed ineffable mysteries, finding himself in prison offered the Lord prayers and hymns in the middle of the night; the king rose at midnight to sing praise, the apostles offered prayers and hymns in the middle of the night.

(19) Let us too imitate these men, building a wall around our life with the habit of prayer and letting nothing ever prove an obstacle to us. There is, in fact, nothing that can be an obstacle to us provided we are on the alert. Listen, after all, once more to the words of the world's teacher: "In every place raising pure hands in prayer, without anger or conflict."³⁷ If you keep your mind purified of improper passions, you can, whether you are in the market place, at home, on a journey, appearing in court, at sea, at the hotel or in the workplace—wherever you are, you can call on God and ob-

34. Ps 42.3.
36. Acts 16.25.

35. Ps 6.6.
37. 1 Tim 2.8.

tain your request. Mindful of this, I beseech you, let us give evidence of assiduity in fasting and prayer, and gain for ourselves the assistance this brings, so as to be regaled with favor from God, live out the present life in a manner pleasing to him, and in the life to come be granted some measure of his loving kindness, thanks to the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, power and honor, now and forever, for ages of ages. Amen.

HOMILY 31

“Tharra took his sons Abram and Nachor, his son Haran’s son Lot, and his daughter-in-law Sarah, his son Abram’s wife, and led them from the land of Chaldea to journey into the land of the Canaanites. He went as far as Charran and settled there.”¹



HANK [282] YOU VERY MUCH both for receiving kindly [283] my words about prayer yesterday and for assembling with such enthusiasm for listening. This it is, you see, that renders us, too, more eager and prompts us to spread before you in more generous measure this spiritual banquet. Likewise in the case of a farmer, when he sees the soil and the seeds sprouting a crop, he doesn't stop exerting himself daily by way of providing the necessary attention and being vigilant day and night in case anything should undermine his efforts. Well, in just the same way I too see this spiritual soil of yours so fertile and this spiritual seed sown in the recesses of your mind; and so I am deeply satisfied and at the same time I have extreme anxiety, knowing as I do the wickedness of the crafty enemy of our salvation. You see, he is like the pirates at sea: when they see a ship laden with much cargo and carrying untold wealth, then in particular they give free rein to their scheming so as to sink that cargo and leave the crew empty-handed and bereft of everything. Well, in this fashion the devil too, when he sees great spiritual wealth amassed—lively zeal, an alert mind—and this wealth daily increasing, he bites his lip and grinds his teeth, and like a pirate he goes about turning over countless schemes in his

1. Gen 11.31 in an expansion of the LXX text, presumably to provide his audience with some of the details Chrysostom has lost by omitting the genealogy in this ch. 11. Speiser notes (*Genesis*, 79) that this LXX spelling of the city we know as Haran retains a form older than the Hebrew; the NT also adopts it (Acts 7.2, 4).

mind so as to discover some slight chink in our armor, render us empty and bereft, and strip us of all our spiritual wealth.

(2) For this reason, pray, let us stay alert, I beseech you, and the more our spiritual resources increase, the more let our spirit of vigilance be intensified; let us strengthen our defences on all sides against his assaults, and through an irreproachable lifestyle let us win favor from God and thus render ourselves superior to the devil's shafts. He is, remember, an evil beast, and has manifold wiles: when he does not succeed in enticing us to wickedness from the outset and ensnaring us through deception (after all, he doesn't apply force or constraint—far from it—but only deception: when he sees us indifferent, he trips us up), when, then, he does not succeed in undermining our salvation in an open way through wickedness itself, frequently through the very works of virtue that we perform he casts his net and unbeknown to us plunders all our wealth. What, then, is it that I am saying? You see, it is necessary to explain it very clearly so that you may be instructed in his schemes and avoid the harm coming from them. When he sees us showing no interest in barefaced wickedness but rather shunning licentiousness and embracing sobriety, and furthermore rejecting greed, showing distaste for injustice, scorning indulgence, and instead devoting ourselves to prayer and fasting and showing zeal for almsgiving, then he devises another scheme by which he can undermine all our resources and render such good deeds fruitless. I mean, those who with great effort survive his wiles he causes to form an inflated opinion of their good deeds and have regard for human glory, his purpose being to make them lose true glory. You see, the person who has some experience of spiritual things and loses sight of them to consider human glory takes his reward from that source already and no longer has God as his debtor; he enjoyed commendation from the people from whom he sought to be praised, and so deprived himself of the rewards promised from the Lord, preferring the passing [284] esteem of his peers to that of the Creator of all.

(3) The Lord himself anticipated this in his teaching on

prayer, almsgiving, and fasting in these words: "When you fast, anoint your head and wash your face in case your fasting becomes obvious to people instead of your Father in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you";² and again, "When you give alms, don't blow your own trumpet," he says, "as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and the open streets so as to be praised by people. Truly, I say to you, they already have their reward."³ Do you see how the person looking for the former reward loses the latter, whereas the one who practices virtue and aims at avoiding people's attention will gain recompense from the Lord publicly on that dread day. "Your Father," the text says, "who sees in secret will reward you publicly." Don't worry, he says, about the fact that not a single human being commended you, and you practiced virtue unnoticed; instead, set your mind on this fact that the Lord's generosity will be so great before long, not in a private fashion nor in secret—rather, he will sing your praises and reward you in the presence of the whole human race from Adam till the end of time, and will bestow on you recompense for your works of virtue. So what degree of excuse would those people deserve who submit to the effort virtue involves, and then for the sake of that passing, vain and futile glory that comes from their peers deprive themselves of esteem from on high?

(4) Let us therefore make ourselves secure, I beseech you, and whatever spiritual deed we have the privilege to perform let us be careful in every way to conceal it completely in the recesses of our mind so that we may win the regard of that unsleeping eye and not render ourselves unworthy of the Lord's esteem for the sake of the esteem of human beings and the flattery often given with favors in view. Both failings, you see, are ruinous and a risk to our salvation—performing spiritual deeds while having an eye to human glory, and nourishing self-importance from whatever good one is able to achieve. Hence it is necessary to be quite alert and to apply to ourselves unremittingly the remedies from Sacred Scrip-

2. Matt 6.17-18.

3. Matt 6.2.

ture so as not to fall foul of these ruinous weaknesses. You see, even if a person was above reproach in countless ways and accomplished every virtue, and yet became filled with self-importance, that person would be the most pitiable and wretched of all. This was made clear to us in what that well-known Pharisee went through, flattering himself by comparison with the Publican and frittering away all the wealth of his virtue through his own words, rendering himself empty-handed and bereft, and suffering a startling and novel shipwreck: having reached the very port he lost all his precious cargo.⁴ In other words, suffering this misfortune from prayers offered wrongly is like meeting with shipwreck in the middle of the harbor. For this reason, of course, Christ too instructed his disciples in these words: "When you have done everything, say, We are unprofitable servants,"⁵ to forewarn them in his wish that they keep themselves at great distance from that ruinous passion. See, dearly beloved, how the person with his mouth open for human glory and performing the works of virtue on that account has no benefit from it either, and the fact that despite practicing every example of virtue, if he seems to give himself credit for it, he finishes up empty-handed and bereft of everything?

(5) So, let us shun all these ruinous weaknesses, I beseech you; let us concentrate on that unsleeping eye, and neither have the same values as our peers nor seek after the commendation that comes from them, [285] but rather be content with the commendation that comes from the Lord. "His praise is not from human beings but from God,"⁶ says Scripture. The more we advance on the way of virtue, the more we cause ourselves to be temperate and restrained. You see, even if we advance to the very pinnacle of virtue, we will (provided we compare this in all gratitude to the kindnesses coming from the Lord) see clearly that we have contributed not even the slightest part of the benefits coming to us. Each of the saints, after all, was conspicuous for this. For proof of

4. Cf. Luke 18.9-14.

6. Rom 2.29.

5. Luke 17.10.

it, listen to the world's teacher, that towering spirit, how despite such great achievements, despite such wonderful testimony from above ("This man is a vessel of election as far as I am concerned," Scripture says, remember⁷), he does not lose sight of his own failings but ponders them insistently, and the sins for which he was quite sure he had received forgiveness in baptism he does not even allow himself to forget but cries aloud, "I am the least of all the apostles, I am not worthy to be called an apostle."⁸ Then for the purpose of our learning the extraordinary degree of his humility, he added, "for the reason that I persecuted the Church of God."

(6) O Paul, what are you doing? In his characteristic generosity the Lord relented and cancelled all your sins—and are you reviving them? Yes, I know, he says, I am aware of the Lord's forgiveness of me—yet whenever I recall my doings and see the ocean of the Lord's loving kindness, then I realize perfectly that it is due to his grace and loving kindness that I am what I am. After saying, remember, "I am not worthy to be called an apostle for the reason that I persecuted the Church of God," he added, "by the grace of God, however, I am what I am";⁹ while I did betray such terrible folly, he says, yet his ineffable goodness and grace granted me forgiveness. Do you see his contrite spirit, constantly recalling the memory of his sins before baptism? Well, let us in our turn imitate this, and our sins after baptism let us remember each day, constantly recall them in our memory and never allow them to recede into oblivion for us. They will prove sufficient restraint, you see, to lead us to reform and self-control. Why do I mention Paul, a man of such quality and calibre? Are you prepared to see also those people in the Old Testament particularly blessed in this regard, showing restraint despite countless deeds of virtue and outspokenness beyond telling? Listen to the words of the patriarch, despite his converse with God, after the promise made to him: "'As for me, however, I am dust and ashes.'"¹⁰

7. Acts 9.15.

9. I Cor 15.10.

8. I Cor 15.9.

10. Gen 18.27.

(7) Since, however, I have made mention of the patriarch, let us put before your good selves today's reading, if you don't mind, so as to explain it and thus see the extraordinary degree of the good man's virtue. "Tharra," the text says, "took his sons Abram and Nachor, his son's son Lot, and his daughter-in-law Sarah, his son Abram's wife, and led them from the land of Chaldea to journey into the land of the Canaanites. He went as far as Charran and settled there. Tharra lived two hundred and five years in Charran, and died in Charran."¹¹ Let us attend precisely to the reading, I beseech you, so as to manage to grasp the sense of the writings. Note, in fact, right in the beginning there seems to be a question in the words used; whereas this blessed author—Moses, I mean—says, [286] "Tharra took Abram and Nachor and led them from the land of Chaldea to journey into the land of the Canaanites. He went as far as Charran and settled there," blessed Stephen used the following words in praising the Jews: "'The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia before he settled in Charran . . . and after his father died he led him there to settle.'"¹² So what does that mean? Is Sacred Scripture contradicting itself? Not at all; rather, you need to understand from this that since the son was godfearing, God appeared to him and bade him move there. His father Tharra, though he happened to be a heathen, nevertheless for the affection he had for his son agreed to accompany him in his migration; he went to Charran, settled there and thus ended his life. Then it was that the patriarch moved to Canaan at God's bidding. Of course, God did not transfer him from there until Tharra passed on.

(8) It was then, remember, after the latter's demise, Scripture says, "The Lord said to Abram: 'Go forth from your country, your kindred and your father's house, onwards to a land that I will show you. I will make you into a mighty nation; I will bless you and magnify your name, and you will be blessed. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who

11. Gen 11.31–32, the LXX extending Tharra's lifespan by inserting the former "in Charran" in v. 32.

12. Acts 7.2, 4.

curse you; all the tribes of the earth will be blessed in you.'"¹³ Let us study each of these words precisely so as to see the godfearing character of the patriarch's attitude. Far from passing the expression idly by, let us consider how much force there is in the direction. "'Go forth,'" he says, "'from your country, your kindred and your father's house, onwards to a land that I will show you.'" Leave behind you, he is saying, what is obvious and accepted, and choose rather what is not clear or apparent. Notice how from the very beginning the good man was trained to prefer the less obvious to the more obvious, and future realities to those which are to hand.

(9) It was, in fact, no slight thing that he was ordered to do—to leave his country where he had lived for so long, all his kindred and the whole of his father's household, and go to a place he didn't know and didn't understand. I mean, he didn't explain what the place he wanted him to migrate to was like; instead, he put to the test the patriarch's godfearing spirit with the vagueness of his command: "'Onwards to a land that I will show you,'" he says. Consider, I ask you, dearly beloved, how the command required a detached attitude that was not handicapped by any attachment or habit. If in these days, despite the growth in religion, there are many people so hidebound by custom that even under pressure of necessity they would times without number opt to endure everything rather than move from the place where they first had their home (something you can see not only in the case of people generally but also in the case of those who have fled public hubbub and chosen the life of monks), well, much more at that time was it likely that the good man had difficulty with the command and found it unpalatable? Go

13. Gen 12.1–3, verses of whose significance Von Rad says: "The transition from primeval history to sacred history occurs abruptly and surprisingly in vv. 1–3. All at once and precipitously the universal field of vision narrows; world and humanity, the entire ecumenical fulness, are submerged, and all interest is concentrated upon a single man . . . What is promised to Abraham reaches far beyond Israel; indeed, it has universal meaning for all generations on earth" (*Genesis*, 150). For us it is significant that Chrysostom, with his more moral and less dogmatic concerns, has taken 31 homilies to exhaust the primeval history and reach the patriarchal narratives.

forth, he says, leave your kindred and your ancestral home, "‘onwards to a land that I will show you.’" Whom, in fact, would these words not have disturbed? He reveals to him neither the place nor the country; he just tests the just man's attitude with his vague command. You see, if anyone else had been so bidden, anyone of a hundred, he would have said: All right, you bid me leave the country I'm now living in, my kindred, my ancestral home. Why don't you make clear to me [287] the country you order me to travel to, so that I may be in a position to know how great the distance? How, after all, tell me, is it going to become clear that that place will be shown to be better and more prosperous than the one I'm leaving?

(10) The just man, on the contrary, neither said any of those things nor contemplated them; instead, with a full realization of the magnitude of the command he preferred what was unclear to what he was in possession of. If, of course, he did not have a lofty intention and wise attitude and had not been schooled in every way to obey God, he would have found no little further obstacle in the fact of his father's death. You know, after all, that many people often choose on account of their families' tombs to die in those same places where their forebears finished their days. Accordingly, it was likely that this good man, had he in fact not been extremely godfearing, would also have reasoned this way: My father left his home for love of me, ignored longstanding customs, proved superior to all other claims and came as far as this place (as if to say, For my sake he finished his days in exile), so shouldn't I in turn be anxious to pay him the same compliment after his death instead of leaving my father's tomb with his kindred and going off? Still, none of these considerations proved sufficient to blunt his purpose; rather, his love of God made everything appear light and easy to him.

(11) Perhaps he could have given thought to this consideration (if, that is, he had wanted to submit his personal interests to human reasoning), namely, how can I make tracks at my age, hastening as I now am towards the end of my days? Unaccompanied by my brother, and not having my kindred

with me, but separated from all those who by family ties are my support, how can I in this desolate and lonely condition take possession of a foreign place without even knowing where my wandering will stop? If it should be my misfortune to lose my life halfway through the journey, what will be the good of this terrible upheaval? Who will lay out for burial this old man, this refugee, friendless and homeless? Perhaps my wife will summon the neighbors to show some compassion and meet necessary expenses from some voluntary contributions. Would it not be far preferable for me, with so little time left to me to live, to end my days remaining here rather than, in my old age, be dragged hither and yon, the object of everyone's jibes, as though incapable at my advanced age of living in tranquility instead of shifting from place to place and never stopping anywhere?

(12) This just man, on the contrary, far from entertaining any of these thoughts, hastened to obey the command. Perhaps, however, someone would say that these words were sufficient encouragement for him, "Onwards to the country that I will show you. I will make you into a mighty nation and I will bless you." Had he not been godfearing, well, this very remark would have been particularly effective in rendering him slow to respond; he could have said, had he been like most people, Why do you guide me to a foreign land and bid me take possession of someone else's country? If you really intend to make me great, why on earth not do it to me here? Why would you not grant me blessing while living in my ancestral home? If it should be my misfortune, before the destination you intend, that I perish from being overcome by the effort of the journey and end my days, what good comes to me from your promises?

(13) He was loath, however, to give thought to any of these notions; instead, he was like a loyal servant in having ears only for the command. He obeyed it without any meddlesome curiosity and was in fact perfectly assured [288] that God's promises were unailing: "I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and magnify your name, and you will be blessed." The scope of the promise is extraordinary: "I will

make you a great nation; I will bless you and magnify your name.'” Not only will I place you at the head of a great nation and cause your name to be great, but as well, “‘I will bless you and you will be blessed.’” I will favor you with so much blessing, he says, that it will last for all time. “‘You will be blessed’” to such an extent that everyone will be anxious to thrust themselves into your company in preference to the highest honor. See how God right from the very beginning foretold to him the notoriety he would later confer upon him. “‘I will make you a great nation;’” he said, “‘I will magnify your name, I will bless you and you will be blessed.’” Hence the Jews too found in the patriarch grounds for self-importance and endeavored to establish their kinship with him in the words, “‘We are children of Abraham.’”¹⁴ For you to learn, however, that on the basis of their evil ways they are in fact unworthy of such kinship, Christ said to them, “‘If you were children of Abraham, you would do the works of Abraham.’”¹⁵ John, too, son of Zechariah, when those anxious to be baptized flocked to the Jordan, said to them, “‘Brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit that benefits repentance, and don’t presume to say, We have Abraham for our father. I tell you, after all, that God can raise up children to Abraham even from these stones.’”¹⁶ Do you see how great his name was in everyone’s estimation? For the time being, however, before the sequel the just man’s godfearing qualities are demonstrated in the way he believed the words coming from God and accepted without demur everything, difficult though it seemed.

(14) “‘I will bless those who bless you,’” he said, “‘and curse those who curse you; all the tribes of the earth will be blessed in you.’” See God’s considerateness in giving him an index of such great love: I will consider as friends those friendly to you, and as enemies those showing enmity to you—something even children hardly manage to achieve in regard to their parents, treating as friends and enemies the

14. Cf. John 8.33.

16. Matt 3.7-9.

15. John 8.39.

same people as they do. Marvelous, therefore, dearly beloved, is God's favor for the patriarch; I will bless those who bless you, he says, and curse those who curse you. "'All the tribes of the earth will be blessed in you.'" Notice the addition of still further liberality: all the tribes of the earth, he says, will be anxious to be blessed in your name, and on the basis of your title will rank their own status more elevated.

(15) Do you hear, dearly beloved, the command the Lord gave to this Chaldean, this old man, ignorant as he was of Law, unacquainted with Prophets and beneficiary of no other teaching?¹⁷ Do you see the scope of the commands? How he stood in need of a sublime and youthful spirit to perform them? Now consider the patriarch's rightmindedness in the way Scripture [289] makes it clear to us: "Abram set out as the Lord God had told him, and Lot traveled with him."¹⁸ It did not simply say, "Abram set out," but "as the Lord God had told him." He did everything, it says, in accordance with the command. God told him to leave everything, kindred and house together, and he left them; he told him to go to a land he did not know, and he agreed; he promised to make him into a mighty nation and to bless him, and he believed that this too would happen. As the Lord God had told him, so he set out—that is to say, he believed the words coming from God, with no hesitation or uncertainty, but rather with mind and purpose firmly decided he set out; hence he enjoyed great favor from the Lord.

(16) "Lot traveled with him," the text adds. Although God had said, "'Go forth from your country, your kindred and your father's house,'" why did he bring Lot with him? It was not that he was disobedient to the Lord; but perhaps because Lot was young and Abram held the place of a father in his regard, and because he was reluctant on the grounds of love and equity to be separated from the good man, Abram could not bear to leave him behind out of this sense of responsibility. From now on Lot took the place of a son to him, since at

17. Whether or not Chrysostom is referring to the threefold division of the Hebrew Bible, there seems some little prolepsis on his part here.

18. Gen 12.4.

his advanced age he was without children owing to Sarah's infertility. In particular the youngster's values were quite in keeping with the just man's: does this not emerge from the fact that, in associating himself with the just man when he had the choice of the two brothers, he showed great insight in making the wise decision as to which of his uncles it would be to whom he should entrust his fortunes? Likewise his choice of exile was itself further proof of the nobility of his values; even if eventually he seemed to fail in some matters when he appropriated the prime lands,¹⁹ nevertheless he lost no time in following the good man's footsteps. Hence the good man took him as companion in his travels, and Lot enthusiastically preferred exile to life at home.

(17) Then, for us to know that it was to no youngster that the Lord's commands to the patriarch were addressed but to someone already pressing old age, a stage when most people are inclined to be reluctant about traveling, Scripture adds, "Now, Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Charan." Do you see how, far from age or anything else capable of winning him over to remaining at home proving a deterrent for him, his love for God proved superior to everything. You see, whenever a soul is alert and vigilant, it cuts through all obstacles and becomes completely the possession of the loved one; it is not upset by any apparent difficulties in its path, but passes them all by, not stopping until it gains the object of its feverish search. For this reason, too, of course, this just man, though vulnerable to impediment from old age and many other factors, broke through all restraints like a young man in his prime, impatient of any obstacle, and thus pressed on in haste to implement the Lord's command. No other way is open to you to implement your plan, after all, if you really want to give evidence of some deed of manly valor, than to make a direct assault initially on everything likely to offer you resistance in such a project. Such, in fact, this good man realized clearly, and he gave every impediment the slip, entertaining no thought of custom, kindred, ancestral home,

19. Cf. Gen 13.11.

burial grounds or even old age, concentrating on one thing alone—how to succeed in fulfilling what was commanded by the Lord. There was scope for recognizing in the exploit plenty of grounds for alarm, a man of advanced age going into exile with his wife, [290] herself by now well on in years, and a pack of servants, not knowing where his journeyings would finish up. Still, if anyone cautiously entertained thoughts like that, what extreme difficulties there were in the journey in those times: it wasn't possible, as it is today, to mingle with people without apprehension and so to engage in travel lightly, since every place had a government different from the next and there were difficulties for people traveling from one lot of rulers to the next, as you passed from kingdom to kingdom almost as each day passed.

(18) So this would have been sufficient obstacle for the good man, too, if he had in fact not had great love and obedience of the command. But as it was, he broke through all these impediments like a spider's web: his faith stiffening his resolve, and with reliance on the trustworthiness of the guarantor, he took to the road. "Abram," the text goes on, "took his wife Sarah, his brother's son Lot, and all the possessions they had acquired in Charran, and set out to travel to the land of Canaan."²⁰ See the precision of Scripture in the way it recounts everything to us so that we may learn through every detail the good man's godfearing qualities: "He took his wife Sarah," the text says, "his brother's son Lot, and everything they had acquired in Charran." It was not without purpose that it said, "everything they had acquired in Charran"; rather, it was for us to learn that the patriarch carried nothing with him from the Chaldeans, but bequeathed all those legacies to his brother and left in the condition of carrying only the things he had been able to acquire in Charran. Now, the remarkable man did this, not to show the esteem he had for those latter possessions, nor because he happened to resemble a miser, but for the purpose of being able to show

20. Gen 12.5. Chrysostom omits the mention given by the Hebrew and LXX among the list of Abram's possessions of the people (*psyche*) they had also acquired.

everyone through his prosperity God's provident care for him: the one who uprooted him from the land of the Chaldeans and in turn bade him move his dwelling from there was the same who day by day increased his prosperity and removed every problem, with the result that this itself proved to be an index of his godfearing attitude—that he traveled along that route carrying such things with him. Each single onlooker, you see, very likely wanted to find out the reason for the just man's departure. Then, being told that he was going into foreign parts at God's bidding and had left behind his own property, they learnt the truth of it from the events themselves and came to know the godfearing qualities of the just man's obedience as well as the extraordinary degree of God's provident care for him.

(19) "He set out," the text says, "to travel to the land of Canaan." How did he come to know that the destination of his traveling would be the land of the Canaanites whereas the effect of the command was, "'Onwards to the land I will show you'?"²¹ Perhaps God revealed this as well to him by bringing into his mind an image of the land he wanted him to move to. In other words, his reason for speaking vaguely in giving him the order, "'Onwards to the land I will show you,'" was to reveal to us the just man's virtue. Then, after he had expended his own resources with great generosity, God in his turn communicated to him knowledge of the land where he wanted him to settle. You see, since he foresaw the extent of the just man's virtue, consequently he uprooted him from his home, bidding him take not even his own brother, because he wanted Abram to become instructor at that time to everyone in Palestine and shortly after to those in Egypt. Do you see how the roots of virtue and the roots of evil are not to be found in nature but in the disposition of the will? See, after all, these two, the patriarch and Nachor, [291] were in fact brothers in the order of nature, whereas they were not

21. Chrysostom with his characteristic 'precision' detects the inconsistency and does not 'pass it idly by'; his solution, of course, cannot invoke the findings of modern criticism as to the presence of various editorial hands at this point.

so by disposition: although the latter rivaled his brother in virtue, yet he had been ensnared in error ahead of time, whereas Abram demonstrated daily to everyone through his own behavior his progress in virtue under God's help.

(20) "Abram reached the land of Canaan, and traveled through the length and breadth of the land as far as the place of Suchem by the lofty oak."²² Scripture informs us of the part of the country where the good man now settles. Then, for us to learn what conditions were like there, it adds, "Now, the Canaanites inhabited the land at that time." It was not without purpose that blessed Moses communicated this further fact; instead, it was for us to learn in this case, too, the patriarch's wise attitude in that, as these places had already been overcome by the Canaanites, he was forced to reside wherever luck would have it, in the manner of a nomad and refugee, like some despicable outcast. Yet he made no difficulty of this condition nor said, Why should this be? I passed my days in Charran in such esteem and attention—and now I'm obliged to go about on sufferance like an exile, a refugee, a stranger, and look for repose in a wretched hovel; and far from being able to find it there, I am obliged to pass my time in tents and shacks, and put up with all other kinds of hardships. Is this all God meant when he said, "'Onwards, and I will make you into a great nation'"? It's a promising beginning for me, to be sure; what improvement is there to look forward to? This, however, wasn't the way the just man presumed to express himself or consider changing his mind; on the contrary, with mind quite made up and unshakable faith he trusted in God's promises and constantly maintained an unflinching resolve—hence he was in turn promptly rewarded with encouragement from on high.

(21) But in case we protract the instruction to great length, let us stop at this point and conclude the sermon, leaving the recommendation with your good selves—to imitate this just man's attitude. Observe the comparison: this just man, despite its being a most unlikely invitation, was asked to leave

22. Gen 12.5b-6.

one country for another and displayed such obedience, without age proving an obstacle or any of the other factors we have enumerated, and without his being made slow to obey by the inconvenience of the time or any other thing capable of discouraging him, and on the contrary the old man broke through all hindrances and sped off in haste like a sprightly youth, in the company of his wife, his brother and his retinue, to give effect to the command issued by God. We, on the other hand, are not called to leave one country for another, but to leave earth for heaven; we don't display the same enthusiasm about obeying, but rather propose in many cases trifling and pointless excuses, nothing being sufficient to win us over—neither the magnitude of the promises, nor the vile-ness of visible realities in being earthly and passing, nor the dignity of him who invites us. Instead, we give evidence of such indifference as to prefer these passing realities to those that last forever, earth to heaven, and things that fade even before being espied to those that can never come to an end. To what extreme, after all, tell me, would our folly reach in amassing these possessions? What madness is this, to be beset each day by pressing desire without at any time having one's fill but rather being in worse condition than drunken sots? I mean, just as they burn the more [292] with thirst the more deeply they drink their wine, and kindle a harsher flame, so too do these people fail to check their desire by surrendering themselves to the tyranny of the desire for possessions, but rather the flame is fanned more ardently and the furnace kindled more savagely, the more possessions they acquire.

(22) Don't we see that our predecessors, despite their gaining possession of the whole world, so to speak, were snatched from it naked and bereft after gaining this solitary legacy; that an account was demanded of them for their guilt and responsibility for everything? While essential differences were frequently distinguishable, each person nevertheless took his leave burdened with the sins of all, carrying punishment for them along with deep wrath, and unable to find any consolation from any quarter. Why, then, tell me, are we so careless in regard to our own salvation and have as little interest in

our own soul as if it were someone else's? Don't you listen to Christ's words, "What will a person give in exchange for his soul?" and again, "What good will it be for a person if he gains the whole world but suffers the loss of his soul?"²³ After all, surely you have nothing equal in value to it. Even if you mention the whole world, you'll be saying nothing. What good is it, as Christ said, to gain the whole world and yet suffer the loss of our souls, which is more part of us than anything else? This soul of ours, therefore, which is so important, which requires us to be so caring in its regard—why do we neglect it to such an extent that it is daily torn asunder, sometimes beset with our desire for material possessions, sometimes cut to pieces with licentiousness, at other times put to shame with anger, and tortured in divers fashion with every single passion, and why do we never or only at the last moment show it any consideration? Who would any longer judge us worthy of excuse or acquit us of imminent punishment?


(23) For this reason, I beseech you, while we still have time, let us cleanse the soul's filth with generous almsgiving, and by this means quench the fire of our sins. Scripture says, remember, "Water will extinguish a blazing fire, and sins are purged away by alms."²⁴ Nothing, in fact, nothing else will be so successful in snatching us from the fire of hell as generosity in this. If we give evidence of it in accord with the laws given us by him, without doing anything for effect but rather out of love for God, we will be able both to wash away the filth of our sins and also win loving kindness from God, thanks to the grace and mercy of his only-begotten Son, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, power and honor, now and forever, for ages of ages. Amen.

23. Matt 16.26.

24. Sir 3.30.

HOMILY 32

"And the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I will give this land to your descendants.' He built an altar on the spot to commemorate the Lord's appearance to him."¹

REAT [292] AND BEYOND ALL TELLING, dearly beloved, is the treasure in the words read just now, and deserving of heightened attention and a mind active and alert so that we may pass over nothing of the riches hidden in these brief phrases. You see, the reason that the loving God did not allow all the contents of the Scriptures to yield themselves spontaneously clear and obvious at first glance with scant reading was that he might disturb our sloth and we might show signs of alertness [293] and thus reap the benefit of them. It normally happens, after all, that matters discovered with effort and research are riveted more firmly in our minds, whereas what is discovered with ease soon flies away from our heart. So, far from showing indifference, I beseech you, let us stir up our thinking and make a thorough and in-depth study of the writings so as to be in a position to gain some greater benefit from them and thus go off home.

(2) The Church of God, in fact, is a spiritual market and a surgery for souls, and, like people going to market, we ought acquire an abundance of good things from here and go home the better for it, and like patients at a surgery we ought receive various remedies for the passions afflicting us and go off. I mean, our purpose in assembling each day is not simply to gossip inconsequentially with one another and then all part; rather, it is for each of us to learn something worthwhile, get healing for our troublesome ailments and take our leave in that condition. After all, how would it not be utterly

1. Gen 12:7.

absurd for us to send our children to school, expecting of them day after day some advantage from their lessons, and never to regret their going there idly and to no purpose if we do not see them making some improvement—whereas, on the other hand, we at our mature age attend this spiritual school without giving evidence of an eagerness equal to theirs, even though the lessons here redound to our good as far as the salvation of our souls is concerned? So let each of us, I beseech you, examine his conscience daily as to the advantage derived from this day's sermon, and the next day's, and so on, lest we too seem to be attending here idly and to no purpose.

(3) Now, for the fact that this discharges me of all responsibility (after all, I bring all my resources to the task and leave nothing undone as far as in me lies) whereas it proves to be the basis of greater condemnation for those who come in ill-humor or attend without care or have no wish to make an improvement, listen to the words of Christ to the man who buried the talent: "Wicked servant, you ought to have lodged my money with the bankers and at my coming I could have expected it with interest,"² whereas about the Jews, "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin—but as it is they don't have any excuse."³ In the present case, however, our concern is not whether we are free of blame; instead, we are anxious for your advancement, and we consider our contentment spoilt, even if we are guiltless on countless scores, if you in your turn do not give evidence of an enthusiasm commensurate with our efforts. This, after all, is the basis of our contentment, seeing your growth in spirituality. I know, of course, that by God's grace you are filled with understanding and can admonish others; in keeping with Paul's advice,⁴ however, I serve you with fresh reminders, stir up your zeal and enthusiasm and ceaselessly supply you with this encouragement in the wish that you become mature and fully developed. After all, I consider it no little demonstration

2. Matt 25.26–27.

3. John 15.22.

4. Chrysostom probably has in mind passages in Paul such as Rom 15.15; Col 4.12; 1 Cor 14.20.

of your advance in God's eyes to attend here daily with such great eagerness and have an insatiable appetite for spiritual teaching. You see, just as appetite for bodily nourishment would be an index of perfect health, so desire for spiritual teaching is a quite unmistakable proof of health in terms of the soul. Hence, of course, knowing as I also do of your love and the fact that, even should I prolong the instruction a thousand times, I would be unable to match your [294] enthusiasm and bring you a surfeit of this spiritual nourishment, I will as far as in me lies not cease providing you daily for your good with whatever God's grace supplies and fixing in your mind the teachings of the holy Scriptures.

(4) So, come now, today too let us entreat the loving Lord to direct our tongue in discovery of what we seek, and let us lay before you the customary instruction by proposing to your good selves those very words previously read out. "The Lord God appeared to Abram," the text says, "and said to him." Wasn't I right in saying at the outset that a great treasure is contained in these brief words? I mean, notice at once the strange and unusual opening of the expression: "The Lord God appeared to Abram," it says. This is the first time we find this stated in Scripture, "he appeared." Neither in the case of Adam, nor Abel, nor Noe, nor anyone else did Sacred Scripture employ this expression. So why is the expression, "he appeared," used? And how is it that elsewhere Scripture says, "No one will see God and live"?⁵ How, then, would we interpret the words of Scripture, "He appeared"? How did he appear to the just man? Surely he didn't see his true being? No—God forbid. What, then? He was seen in the way he alone knows and in the manner possible for Abram to see. In his inventiveness, you see, our wise and loving Lord, showing considerateness for our human nature, reveals himself to those who worthily prepare themselves in advance. He explains this through the sacred author in the words, "I gave many visions and took shape in the works of the inspired

5. Cf. Exod 33.20. Chrysostom illustrates in this passage the Antiochene process of wrestling with each item of the text.

authors.”⁶ Isaiah in his turn saw him seated, something that is inapplicable to God, since he doesn’t sit down—how could he, after all, with his unique nature being incorporeal and indefectible? Daniel too saw him, as the Ancient of Days;⁷ Zechariah had a different vision of him,⁸ and Ezekiel in turn a different one.⁹ This is the reason, therefore, that he said, “I gave many visions,” that is, I appeared in a way suited to each one.

(5) So in the present case, after he uprooted the just man from his home and bade him go into a foreign country where he arrived and roamed around in the manner of a nomad and a stranger, since the Canaanites still occupied the land, and was looking around to see where he should take up his abode, the good Lord wished to console him and strengthen his resolve lest he lose enthusiasm and doubt the promise already made to him, “Go forward, and I will make you into a great nation.” The good man, after all, had before his eyes happenings that were contrary to promise, and himself amongst the most contemptible and abject of men, a forlorn survivor, without means of finding a haven. So to stimulate his resolve, “The Lord appeared to Abram,” it says, “and said to him, ‘I will give this land to your descendants.’” You see, although the just man, who was in fact in his old age, had no children on account of Sarah’s sterility, he promises to endow the child born to him with the land. Consider, I ask you, God’s loving kindness, how in his foreknowledge of the just man’s virtue he wants to bring him to the notice of everyone and, like some hidden pearl, make him conspicuous in this way. In heaping promises on promises and making these wonderful offers he postpones their fulfilment somewhat so that the patriarch’s godfearing qualities may be demonstrated [295] by the fact of his seeing things turning out contrary to promise for the time being without the blessed man’s being alarmed or dis-

6. Hos 12.10, a key text for Chrysostom’s theology of the incarnation of the Word in Scripture.

7. Dan 7.22.

8. Zec 1.

9. Ezek 1ff. See Introduction (18) in FOTC 74 for comment on Chrysostom’s expectations of his congregation’s familiarity with the Bible.

turbed, but rather keeping his resolve undeterred in his belief that without doubt what was once promised him by God was in fact firm and secure. Let us, however, scrutinize everything in detail so that in this way we may learn both the good God's inventive wisdom and the care he showed in regard to the just man, as well as the patriarch's love for the Lord. "The Lord God appeared to Abram," the text says. How did he appear? In the way God alone knows, and in the way it was possible for Abram to see him. You see, I don't cease saying this, ignorant as I am of the way it happened; I am content to listen to the words of Scripture, "The Lord God appeared to Abram, and said to him, 'I will give this land to your descendants.'"

(6) Keep precisely in mind the promises made by God, so that when you see the just man beset by various circumstances, you may discover the extraordinary degree of his good sense, the fibre of his courage, and the firm and stable quality of his love for God, and that you may learn the lesson from what happened to this just man never to regard it as a case of abandonment by God when you see someone beset by trials from the ungodly or other tribulations of this life. Instead, have a mind to the diversity of God's designs and leave all to his unsearchable providence. After all, he allows this good man, as godfearing as he was and so exemplary for his great obedience, to suffer so many trials which you are presently quite well aware of, not out of disregard for his servant but in his desire to reveal his virtue to everyone else. It is, in fact, customary with him to do this to each of the just ones: as many of you as are familiar with the reading of the holy Scriptures will be in a position to discover the truth right from the beginning and find God disposing of the life of his servants in this way. So how would it not be a mark of extreme ingratitude to consider this concession by God a case of abandonment and not to regard it as an extraordinary sign of great care and ineffable love? Accordingly, to show the excess of his power he realizes these two objects from this incident: he renders obvious to everyone his servant's endurance and courage as well as the inventiveness of his providence

even amidst inauspicious circumstances, and after success had almost been despaired of he directs affairs as he wishes without being impeded by difficulties occurring in the process. "The Lord God appeared to Abram," the text says, "and said to him, 'I will give this land to your descendants.'" A wonderful promise, particularly welcome to the just man: you appreciate how people who reach old age, especially if they have passed their whole life childless, long for children. So the Lord God gave him this reward for his obedience in heeding the words, "'Leave your country,'" without delaying or postponing but responding to the command and putting into effect what had been ordered—hence he says, "'I will give this land to your descendants.'"

(7) Consider how through this statement he stirred Abram's thinking and supplied him with a recompense that matched his difficulties. This was the reason, of course, that the good man demonstrated his personal gratitude by immediately taking steps to offer thanksgiving. "He built an altar on the spot to commemorate the Lord's appearance to him," the text says. See the indication of his godfearing attitude: the very spot where he had been accorded converse with God he consecrated [296] and gave evidence of thanksgiving as far as he could. This, in fact, is the meaning of the phrase, "He built an altar"—that is, he gave thanks for the promises made to him. Just as people under the influence of affection often build homes whenever they happen to meet people kindly disposed to them, and many have even founded cities and named them after their association with kindred spirits, well, in just the same way this just man, on the spot where he had been accorded a vision of God, "built an altar to commemorate the Lord's appearance to him, and moved on from there," the text says. What is the meaning of "moved on from there"? That after consecrating the place at that stage and dedicating it to God, he departed from there and transferred to another place, the text says, "to the mountain east of Bethel and pitched his tent there"¹⁰—in other words, it says, he

10. Gen 12.8. .

erected a temporary dwelling. See how frugal he was, how unencumbered, to move in this way without difficulty, accompanied by both wife and household. Let men heed this, let women heed it; often when we have occasion to go into the open country, we think of countless pieces of equipment and get involved in many and varied tasks for the sake of bringing along many things that, far from being of any use, are pointless and idle, and we bring with us and encumber ourselves with things that are the object of our attention merely for show.

(8) Not so this just man, however. Instead, what? After being accorded converse with God, he consecrated the place and built an altar; then he moved elsewhere with complete ease. "He pitched his tent there, with Bethel to the west and Aggai to the east; there he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord." See how in every way he displays his own godfearing attitude: he built the altar there on account of the promise made him by God, consecrated the place and moved on; but there in turn, after pitching his tent, "he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord." Do you see his reasonable attitude? do you recognize the advice given in his letters by the world's remarkable teacher, blessed Paul, in the words, "In every place raising your hands in prayer,"¹¹ being put into practice by the patriarch ahead of time in building an altar in every place and offering thanksgiving to the Lord? He knew, you see, he knew well that the God of all looks for nothing more from the human race, despite his countless kindnesses beyond all telling, than a grateful attitude and knowing how to render thanks for his favors.

(9) Let us see once more, however, how in this case the just man moves on. "Abram moved on and traveled until he pitched camp in the desert."¹² Notice once again his godfearing attitude and his great wisdom. Once again, the text says, he left there and "pitched camp in the desert." Why did he move on from there? Perhaps because he could see some of

11. 1 Tim 2.8.

12. Gen 12.9.

the inhabitants were not pleased with his being there. Hence, of course, he showed the extraordinary degree of his tolerance and the way he set great store by peace and treated no one shabbily by choosing the desert as his territory. "He traveled," the text says, "until he pitched camp in the desert." That is a strange expression for Sacred Scripture to use: as it is normal to use the expression in the case of war, so too in the present case it is said of [297] the just man that he pitched camp so as to show the patriarch's unencumbered condition; since, just as soldiers with ease pitch camp now in one place, now in another, so too this just man, though accompanied by his wife, his nephew and such a large household, made these transfers with greater ease. Do you see his unencumbered life in his old age accompanied by wife and household? Yet what particularly strikes me with admiration is the fortitude of his wife: when I consider the frailty of womankind, and ponder how she made those transfers with ease in the company of the just man, not grumbling about it herself nor proving an obstacle to the just man, I reckon that she was endowed no less than the just man with a courageous and highly motivated intention. We will grasp this in particular as we move on to what follows in the reading.

(10) Did you notice how after hearing, "I will give this land to your descendants," the just man, far from settling down, moved from one place to another, and, in turn, from there to still another place? See him driven also from the desert, however, not by men but by the pressure of famine: "There was a famine in the land."¹³ Let this be heeded by those people who speak idly and unguardedly, playing the soothsayer and maintaining that when so-and-so arrived, famine struck, and when so-and-so left, it stopped. See, there was a famine on the arrival of the just man, a severe famine, though the just man did not panic nor suffer any human reaction nor attribute responsibility for the famine to his own arrival. But when he saw nature under constraint and famine in control, "Abram went down into Egypt," the text says, "to sojourn

13. Gen 12.10.

there, because famine raged in the land." Consider how progress was proving more gradual for the just man; the Lord was providing that he should be teacher not only for the inhabitants of Palestine but also for those in Egypt, and that he should make the light of his own virtue conspicuous to everyone. You see, since he was like a hidden lantern concealed in the land of the Chaldeans, God shifted him from there so that he might conduct those seated in the darkness of error towards the way of truth. Perhaps, however, someone may say, Why didn't he arrange for those in the land of the Chaldeans to be brought through him to religion? While it is likely that his providence was exercised through other channels for their salvation as well, yet listen to the words of Christ, "No prophet is without honor except in his own country."¹⁴ So to give effect to his own promise made in the words, "'I will magnify your name,'" he allows famine to occur for that purpose, and in this way necessity to bring him to Egypt, so that people there also may learn how great is the man's virtue. In other words, famine, like a jailer brandishing bonds, uprooted them from the desert and drove them into Egypt.

(11) But let us now see the sequel and the extent of the problem the just man was embroiled in, so that we may discover his courage and his wife's good sense. You see, when they had covered a large part of their journey and then found themselves close to Egypt, the good man became anxious and spoke to his wife in fear and trembling for his very life, as you might say. "When Abram was on the point of entering Egypt," the text goes on, "he said to his wife Sarah: 'I'm aware that you are a very beautiful woman. So it will happen that, when the Egyptians see you, [298] they will say, She is his wife, and they will kill me, but spare your life. Consequently say, I am his sister, so that things may go well for me on your account, and my life will be spared thanks to you.'"¹⁵ Do you see from these words the extent of the alarm and dread into which the good man fell, without at all losing his clarity of thought, or having panic spread to his frame of

14. Matt 13.57.

15. Gen 12.11-13.

mind, or giving voice to such thoughts as, What's happening? We're not abandoned, are we? Surely we're not deceived? The Lord hasn't deprived us of his providential care, has he? Would the one who said, "I will magnify you, and will give this land to your descendants," leave us at this stage like this, to fear the worst and fall into flagrant risk to life?

(12) No such thoughts did the just man entertain; instead, his one concern was how to manage to devise some stratagem to find a solution to the famine and escape the hands of the Egyptians. "I'm aware," the text reads, "that you are a very beautiful woman." See how great was the woman's beauty, even though they had then reached old age, how she was still blooming despite her great age, and bore the flush of beauty on her face despite such awful trouble and misfortune endured on the way in moving from place to place, shifting from the lands of the Chaldeans to Charran, from there to Canaan, and from there in turn to Chananea, and so from there and finally to Egypt. So what man, even the most sprightly, would not have been devastated by these unending movements? Yet this remarkable woman, with the splendor of her beauty still upon her despite such wear-and-tear, instilled into her husband an extremely severe alarm—hence his words, "I'm aware that you are a very beautiful woman. So it will happen that, when the Egyptians see you, they will say, She is his wife, and they will kill me, but spare your life." Consider how he trusted in his wife's behavior, and wasn't afraid she would ever become conceited because of their compliments; rather, he offered her further persuasion in these terms: "Lest they kill me while sparing your life, consequently say, I am his sister, so that things may go well for me, and my life will be spared thanks to you." Since it was no ordinary thing he was requiring of her, he meant to win her over with the explanation he supplied by inclining her to compassion and persuading her to play her part convincingly. "So it will happen," he said, "that, when the Egyptians see you, they will say, She is his wife, and they will kill me, but spare your life." He didn't say, They will abuse you; at that stage he didn't want to frighten her with his remarks, espe-

cially as he had qualms about God's promise. Hence he said, "They will spare your life. Consequently say, I am his sister."

(13) Consider, I ask you, the extent of the panic the just man's mind had probably fallen into when he urged this course on his wife. I mean, you know perfectly well how there is nothing more depressing for husbands than having their wives fall under suspicion of this kind. Yet the good man shows all anxiety and takes every step to ensure the adultery is put into effect.¹⁶ Don't, however, dearly beloved, rashly condemn the good man; rather, gain from this a particular insight into his great sagacity and courage—yes, his courage in nobly withstanding and overcoming turmoil of mind to the extent of planning such stratagems. For proof, after all, that nothing is more difficult to bear than this, listen to the words of Solomon: "A man's jealousy is intermingled with rage: he will have no mercy on the day of vengeance, nor will his enmity be sated in return for many gifts";¹⁷ and again, "Jealousy is harsh as Hell."¹⁸ Let us, however, notice many people falling into such madness that they did not even spare their own wives, but as well oftentimes caused the death of both the adulterer and themselves. [299] So extreme is the fury of this behavior and so unrestrained is jealousy as to cause the person once snared in this passion to be oblivious even of his own salvation. On the one hand, it is possible to recognize in this incident the just man's courage and, on the other hand, his keen sagacity in being able, despite finding himself in such an awful predicament as though snared in nets, to find this way by which the evil might be made less severe. You see, if he had said that she was his wife and had not enacted that artifice by employing the name 'sister', she would have been wrested from the just man once the beauty of her appearance seduced the Egyptians' lecherous mind, and the good man

16. Chrysostom has none of the unease about accepting the obvious interpretation of Abram's action shown by some modern commentators like Speiser (but not Von Rad)—though, as usual, he is not above a little rationalizing as well.

17. Prov 6.34–35 in Chrysostom's abbreviated text.

18. Song 8.6.

would have been killed so as not to remain as witness of the crime. So since these two unfortunate events were ineluctably due to occur owing to men's incontinence and the king's tyranny, Abram said, for the purpose of their being able to find some small consolation amidst utter helplessness, "Say, I am his sister;" this may rescue me from danger. After all, as far as I am concerned, whether you say you are my sister or my wife, there will be no preventing the ineluctable conclusion that they will proceed to your abduction on account of your beauty of form, whereas there is a chance for me to escape their designs if you employ the name 'sister'. Do you see the just man's sagacity, how despite being in their clutches he could still find some way to plan how he might manage to prove superior to the Egyptians' plot?

(14) Furthermore, conclude from this, I ask you, both the just man's endurance and his wife's goodness. His endurance, on the one hand, in not losing his temper and saying, Why do I bring her with me, proving as she is the cause of such disaster for me? What advantage, after all, is there for me in the relationship, now that I am on the point of risking everything for her sake? What good is it to me when she not only brings me no comfort but is even the cause of death itself to me through her very beauty? He neither said nor thought any such thing; instead, he rejected any such thought and doubted in no way God's promise, concerning himself with one thing only—how to succeed in escaping the foreseen danger. Consider in this case, I ask you, dearly beloved, God's ineffable longsuffering, how in no way did he assist or console the just man, but rather allowed his trouble to come to a head and increase, and permitted him to come to the end of his tether, at which point he displayed his characteristic providence. "Consequently say," Abram said, "I am his sister, that things may go well for me on your account, and my life will be spared thanks to you." This is what the good man had said—not the mark of a person about to breathe his last (Scripture says, after all, "Don't fear those who destroy the body but are unable to destroy the soul"¹⁹); rather, his re-

19. Matt 10.28.

marks on this occasion to his wife were according to habit. "So that things may go well for me on your account," he said, "and my life will be spared thanks to you"—as if to say to her, Say, I am his sister, in case you cause my flight from famine in Canaan to lead me into the clutches of the Egyptians. So prove to be the cause of my salvation, "so that things may go well for me on your account." Piteous words: great was his fear on account of Egyptian passion and also because of the fact that the tyranny of death had been let loose. Hence the good man chose even to be an accomplice in his wife's adultery, as if playing the role of adulterer in his wife's shame, so as to avoid death. Its face, you see, was fearsome: its brazen gates had not yet been broken, its edge had not yet been blunted.

(15) Do you see the bond of love between husband and wife? Do you see [300] what trust the husband had in imposing to such an extent on his wife, and the degree of cooperation he received from his wife? She neither demurred nor complained; instead, she did everything to carry off the deception. Let husbands and wives take note and imitate their harmony, the bond of their love, the depth of their devotion, and let them emulate Sarah's self-control. Because, despite her old age, she not only remained so conspicuous for beauty but also rivaled the just man's virtues, she was consequently rewarded with so much providential care from God and with reward from on high. Accordingly, let no one point the finger at a beautiful appearance nor make those brainless remarks, Beauty ruined such-and-such a woman, beauty proved the cause of so-and-so's disaster. Beauty wasn't the cause—far from it—it is a work of God; rather, depraved will is the cause of every evil. Do you see this remarkable woman dazzling in every respect, with beauty of soul and beauty of feature both, following in the good man's footsteps? Let women imitate her: lo, despite everything—elegant appearance, sterility, advanced age, a condition of prosperity, so much shifting and traveling, constant problems coming in rapid succession—nothing unhinged her thinking; instead, she remained on an even keel. For this reason, of course, she won reward worthy

of her endurance, to succeed in her extreme old age in bearing a child in her infertile womb and elderly frame.

(16) "So that things may go well with me on your account," Abram said, "and my life will be spared thanks to you." There is no recourse left me for survival, he is saying, other than your being prepared to say, "I am his sister." In other words, perhaps I will escape the threatening danger, and thanks to you I will now stay alive and attribute to you my life henceforth. His words were sufficient to win his wife over and engage her compassion. This really is wedlock, being associated not only in fair times but also in risky situations; this is a sign of true love, this is a hallmark of really genuine affection. A gleaming diadem atop the head does not so well betoken the king as this blessed woman's splendid example was revealed in her very responsiveness which she showed in regard to her husband's proposal. So who would not be amazed at the thought of her utter acceptance? Who could adequately extol her for her readiness, despite her remarkable continence and at this advanced age, to expose herself to adultery and accept intercourse with a barbarian for the sake of saving the life of the just man to the extent her own compliance made possible?

(17) Wait just a moment, however, and you will see God's inventive providence. You see, he gave evidence of such long-suffering thus far for the purpose of rendering the good man's virtue even more conspicuous and so that through what happened there, not only people in Egypt but also people in Palestine might be instructed as to the extent of the favor the patriarch enjoyed from the Lord of all. The text goes on, remember, "When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians noticed that his wife was very beautiful. Pharaoh's courtiers saw her, sang her praises to Pharaoh and brought her into Pharaoh's household. On her account they treated Abram well: there came into his possession sheep, cattle and asses, slave boys and girls, mules and camels."²⁰ See how those things which the just man placed no store in previously came

20. Gen 12.14-16.

into his possession. You see, as he entered [301] Egypt, "the Egyptians noticed that his wife was very beautiful"—not simply beautiful but such as to win the hearts of all who saw her through her extraordinary beauty. "Pharaoh's courtiers saw her and sang her praises to Pharaoh." Don't pass this sentence idly by, dearly beloved; instead, marvel how none of the Egyptians laid a hand on the woman, stranger though she was and a traveler from foreign parts, nor did they abuse her husband; on the contrary, they went in and gave a report to the king. Now, this happened so that the matter should be more public and that when retribution was taken on the ruler, not just any private person, this event would be bruited abroad.

(18) "They brought her into Pharaoh." Immediately the just man was separated from his wife, and she was personally conducted to Pharaoh. Notice the extent of God's longsuffering, how not at the beginning or from the outset does he give evidence of his characteristic providence, but rather permits everything to happen, letting the woman fall almost into the jaws of the beast, and only then makes his power felt by everyone. "They brought her into Pharaoh's household." In what state of turmoil was the woman's mind at that time? How disturbed was her thinking? What kind of storm broke upon her? How did she not suffer shipwreck instead of remaining unmoved like a rock, awaiting grace from on high? Yet why single out this woman for mention? What state of mind was the just man probably in at her introduction into Pharaoh's household? "On her account they treated Abram well"—as her brother, that is: "there came into his possession sheep, cattle and asses, slave boys and girls, camels and mules." All these things that he was given for his keep and by way of a bribe, however—what a conflagration did they not enkindle in him? How did they not burn into his mind and inflame his thinking as he considered the motive behind the gifts?

(19) Do you see the perils reaching almost the very limit? Do you see how by the norms of human logic no hope of reversal of fortunes was now left? Do you see how by human reasoning the situation was to be despaired of? Do you see

how the woman had fallen into the very jaws of the beast? Now observe God's ineffable love in this incident, and marvel at the extraordinary degree of his power. The text goes on, "God afflicted Pharaoh and his household with terribly severe afflictions over Sarah, Abram's wife." What is the meaning of "afflicted"? It means imposed punishment for his rash and evil exploit. "Severe afflictions"—not merely "afflicted" the king, but "with severe afflictions." Since the rash deed was no slight matter but extremely serious, the punishment was accordingly severe. "And his household": why did all the members of his household share in the punishment when the king alone had sinned? This too did not happen without purpose: the intention was to reach the king's folly in this way, too. You see, there was need of a particularly severe chastisement so that the chastised might desist from his depravity. How was that a fair thing, you will say, for them to be punished on his account? It wasn't only on his account that they received punishment; rather, it was likely that they too had been involved in arranging and effecting the crime that was about to be committed. After all, did you hear what Scripture said before, that "Pharaoh's courtiers sang her praises, and brought her into Pharaoh's household." You saw them having played the role of panders in regard to the [302] just man's wife by way of favor to the king. For this reason, of course, not only he personally but also all his retinue shared in the punishment, so that they might learn that their unseemly behavior was not directed simply at a stranger or some person of no account but at a man who was the object of God's special concern and accorded such marvellous care by him. Hence, therefore, God depressed his thinking with the extreme severity of the punishment, checked him in his loathsome exploit, dissuaded him from his irrational impulse, halted his lecherous intent, contained his undisciplined desire, reined in the fury of his lust.

(20) Consequently, see him now: with how much reasonableness the king now speaks, the tyrant to the stranger as though to some nomad whose wife he had ventured to abduct. Scripture was right in saying, "He afflicted Pharaoh and his household over Sarah, Abram's wife." Along with the pun-

ishment came the realization that she was the just man's wife; though she had been taken into Pharaoh's household, she still remained in fact the just man's wife. "Now, Pharaoh summoned Abram and said to him, 'Why did you do this to me?'"²¹ Notice the kind of words the king utters: "'Why did you do this to me?'" he says. Did I do something to you, stranger that I was, no one's friend, come under pressure of famine, to the king, the tyrant, the ruler of Egypt? What did I do to you? You abducted my wife, you scorned me as a stranger, spurned me, treated me as of no account; a helpless victim of your unrestrained lust, you were bent on putting into effect your plans in my regard. So what did I do to you? You did terrible things to me, he said, and committed crimes against me. See how great was the reversal of fortunes: the prince says to the peasant, "'Why did you do it to me?'" You have turned God against me, he says, you have brought his anger upon me, you have made me liable to punishment, you have caused me to pay the penalty with all my household for my efforts against you. "'Why did you do this to me in not letting me know that she is your wife? Why on earth did you say, She is my sister? I took her for my wife,'"²² I had in mind to take her, he says, as a sister of yours. How did you come to learn that she was the good man's wife? The avenger of such awful disorder, he it was who brought this to my knowledge. "'So why did you do this to me in not letting me know that she is your wife? I took her for my wife'" and was on the point of sinning. Thinking she was your sister I had her in my company and ventured to put this into effect.

(21) Notice how the severity of the punishment depressed his thinking to the extent of leading him to offer an excuse to the just man and show signs of every care for him. And yet had God's grace not been active in appeasing his mind and instilling fear into him, the consequence would have been that he would have flown into an even worse temper to the extent of evening the score with his deceiver, the just man, wreaking his vengeance on him, and bringing him to the ul-

21. Gen 12.18.

22. Gen 12.18b-19a.

timate peril. He did none of this, however; fear quenched the fire of his anger, and his one concern was to show signs of care for the just man. He now knew, you see, that it was impossible that this could be an unimportant man if he enjoyed such marvelous favor from on high. "‘Now, behold, your wife is before you; take her and be off with you.’" In other words, now that I know she is your wife, not your sister, lo, she's yours; I meant no harm to your union, and did not rob you of your wife. On the contrary, "‘behold, your wife is before you—take her, and be off with you.’"

(22) What imagination could adequately conceive amazement at these events? What tongue could manage to express this amazement? A woman dazzling in her beauty is closeted with an Egyptian [303] partner, who is king and tyrant, of such frenzy and incontinent disposition, and yet she leaves his presence untouched, with her peerless chastity intact. Such, you see, God's providence always is, marvelous and surprising. Whenever things are given up as hopeless by human beings, then he personally gives evidence of his invincible power in every circumstance. A comparison can in fact be made with that marvelous and unusual situation of seeing the man of passion²³ surrounded by those dreadful wild beasts without coming to any harm, but emerging from the pit unscathed as though encircled by sheep, along with the three young men in the furnace, harmed in no way by the fire as if passing their time in a meadow or garden, and emerging from it just as if they were graven pillars. Well, in just the same way the present event deserves our wonder in that the just man's wife suffered no abuse from the Egyptian king, tyrant and lecher that he was, but emerged safe and sound. God, you see, it was who effected it all, who gives support when none is forthcoming and can always bring things from desperate circumstances to sound hope.

(23) "‘Now, behold, your wife is before you; take her and be off.’" Don't think, he is saying, that you have been injured

23. Cf. Dan 3. As mentioned above at Homily 22, n. 11, Chrysostom employs here the version of Theodotion, which differs from the LXX in details such as the reference to Daniel as "man of passion."

by us. In fact, whereas our actions were done out of ignorance, behold, we now know the calibre of your protector; the anger descending on us has taught us the extent of the favor you enjoy from the God of all. So take your wife and be off with you. Now the just man was an object of dread to them, on account of which they hastened to ply him with great attention so as to propitiate his Lord by favors done to him. Do you see, dearly beloved, the extent of his patient endurance? In this connection, I ask you, remember those words which the patriarch used when he was about to approach the confines of Egypt: "I'm aware that you are a very beautiful woman. So it will happen that, when the Egyptians see you, they will kill me but spare your life.'" So, with those words in mind, consider what actually happens in this case, and marvel both at the just man's endurance and at the power of the loving God in causing the good man to depart with such distinction after entering the country with such terrible fear and dread. "Pharaoh gave his men instructions about Abram, to escort him and his wife, all his possessions, and Lot with him."²⁴ Now the good man leaves with pomp and circumstance and with plentiful supplies, and turns out to be a teacher not only of the people in Egypt through what had occurred, but also of those along the way and the inhabitants of Palestine. I mean, people who saw him traveling down under pressure of the famine, moving with fear and trembling, and now in turn with such notoriety, prosperity and wealth came to know of the power of God's providence in his favor. Who ever saw anything like it? Who ever heard of it? He left to find relief from famine—and came back like this, bedecked with wealth and untold distinction.

(24) Don't be surprised, dearly beloved, nor marvel at what happened; rather, marvel, be stunned and glorify the power of the common Lord of us all. See also Abram's descendants going down, on the one hand, into Egypt in the same fashion under pressure of famine, and in turn leaving there in pros-

24. Gen 12.20, the LXX including Lot, perhaps under the influence of the next verse.

perity after terrible servitude and hardship. This, after all, is the extent of the Lord's inventiveness: when he allows terrible things to reach a climax, then it is that in turn he scatters the storm and brings peace and quiet and a complete change of fortunes so as to teach [304] us the greatness of his power. "Now, Abram left Egypt, he and his wife and all his possessions, and Lot in his company, and he went into the desert."²⁵ You would be right in applying to this just man those words that blessed David used of those who returned from the captivity in Babylon: "Though they sow in tears they will reap in joy. They went their way and wept as they cast their seed, but in returning they will come in joy, carrying their sheaves aloft."²⁶ Did you see his downward journey to be beset with worry and fear, with the fear of death heavy upon him? Now see his return marked by great prosperity and distinction! The just man now, you see, was an object of respect to everyone in Egypt and in Palestine. After all, who would have failed to show respect for the one who so enjoyed God's protection and was accorded such wonderful care? Quite likely what befell the king and his household escaped no one's attention. His purpose, you see, in permitting everything and in allowing the just man's trials to reach such a point was that his endurance might appear more conspicuous, his achievement might win the attention of the whole world, and no one would be unaware of the good man's virtue.

(25) Do you see, dearly beloved, the magnitude of the benefit coming from his trials? Do you see the greatness of the reward for his endurance? Do you see both man and wife, advanced in age though they were, giving evidence of so much good sense, so much courage, so much affection for one another, such a bond of love? Let us all imitate this, and never become dispirited nor consider the onset of tribulations to be a mark of abandonment on God's part or an index of scorn; rather, let us treat it as the clearest demonstration of God's providential care for us. I mean, even if we have the burden of sin weighing upon us, we will be able by showing

25. Gen 13.1.

26. Ps 126.5-6.

great endurance and thankfulness to make them less burdensome; if we don't have many sins, in our turn too we will likewise enjoy greater favor from on high if we render thanks. Our Lord, you see, is loving and is interested in our salvation, and for this reason he gives us the opportunity of the onset of tribulations in the manner of some sort of exercise and training so that we in our turn may show what we are capable of and thus enjoy more generous favor from him. Knowing this, let us not grow slack under trials nor offer resistance to distress, but rather even rejoice, according to blessed Paul, who says, "Now I rejoice in my distress."²⁷ Do you see his grateful spirit? If he rejoiced in distress, could he ever then have been a victim to depression? If what caused depression in others provided him with grounds for contentment, consider, I ask you, the condition of his soul.

(26) For you to learn that there is no other way available to gain the good things promised us and be found worthy of the kingdom of heaven than by passing the present life in distress, listen to the apostles speaking to recent converts to the faith. "After making many disciples," the text says, "they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the disciples' spirits and exhorting them to remain steadfast in the faith by telling them that we must enter the kingdom of heaven through great distress."²⁸ So what excuse can we make if we are unwilling to bear in a spirit of nobility, courage and thankfulness whatever befalls us, now that we see that there is no other way open to us to gain our salvation than by traversing this path? For proof, after all, that in passing the present life in distress none [305] of the just ones endured anything novel or unusual, listen to Christ's words, "In the world you will have distress, but take heart."²⁹ That is, in case on hearing this they should become depressed, he communicated to them immediately some encouragement in promising them grace from himself: "But take heart," he said, "I have overcome the world." You have with you, he

27. Col 1.24, where Chrysostom reads "distress" for "sufferings."

28. Acts 14.21-22.

29. John 16.33.

means, the one who lightens the weight of grief, who does not allow you to be overwhelmed by the onset of tribulations, who with the trial brings also escape from it, and does not permit difficulties to beset you beyond your strength.³⁰ Why are you upset? Why are you worried? Why are you greatly vexed? Why so faint of heart? After all, provided we apply all the resources at our disposal—our endurance, patience and thankful attitude—surely he will never allow us to be the object of scorn? Even if things reach a sorry pass, they are no match for our Lord's wisdom, are they? Let us give evidence of our own good will and have a faith that is unalloyed, knowing as we do the inventiveness of the protector of our souls. And he, who knows what is for our good far better than we, will arrange things appropriately to such an extent that they will turn out as they should in his designs and for our good, so that we may gain the reward of our endurance and be thought worthy of loving kindness on his part, thanks to the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, power and honor, now and forever, for ages of ages. Amen.

30. Cf. 1 Cor 10.13.

HOMILY 33

"Now, Abram was very rich in cattle, silver and gold. He journeyed to where he had come from, into the desert as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had formerly been, between Bethel and Haggai, to the place of the altar which he had made there in the beginning."¹



BEING [305] YOUR GATHERING here today with such enthusiasm and your interest in listening to me, I want to discharge the debt I owe your good selves. I am aware that you for your part have possibly forgotten everything on account of the lapse of many days in the meantime and the fact that we have directed our sermon to other themes. The arrival of the sacred festival interrupted our series: it was not appropriate for us while celebrating the Lord's Cross to have instruction on other matters; instead, each time we felt the need to lay before you a table suited to the occasion. This, of course, was the reason why, when the day of the Betrayal arrived, we interrupted the sequence of our instruction in response to need and directed our words to the betrayer, and then in turn proposed for your consideration thoughts about the Cross. Then, when Resurrection day dawned, it behooved us to instruct your good selves on the Lord's Resurrection, and next to provide you in the days following the Resurrection with a demonstration of it through the wonders that happened afterwards, when we took up the Acts of the Apostles and from there laid before you the customary feast, offering particular exhortation day after day to those who had just been granted the favor of baptism.

(2) So now we must remind you of the debt and at long last

1. Gen 13.2-4. This homily, as our Introduction explains and Chrysostom points out below, was delivered after a long gap for Easter and other occasional sermons. Cf. Introduction (1) & (8) in FOTC 74.

proceed to discharge it. You see, even if you are not aware of the kind of debt on account of your being plagued with many cares, like having care of your wife, being concerned for your children, [306] being anxious for daily nourishment, and beset with many other worldly preoccupations, we on the contrary, being hampered by no such worries, can recall the debt to your mind and take steps to discharge it. Don't be surprised if we give evidence of such readiness to repay: this debt is of a kind different from material wealth. I mean, in the latter case the debtor would never be quick to display his readiness to repay, realizing that repaying his debt reduces his own means while increasing the wealth of his creditor. In the case of this spiritual debt, however, it is nothing like that; by repaying his debt the debtor is, on the contrary, all the better off, and the creditors' profit is greater. Hence, in the former case defaulting on debts is frequent, whereas in the latter case great gain accrues to both parties, both debtor and creditors. This is what Paul, too, says in his exhortation on love, "Don't owe anyone anything except to love one another,"² to show that this debt is always reckoned to be due for repayment, not for withholding. You, too, must not be negligent about keeping yourself in readiness to receive repayment: this makes us better off in making repayment, and will prove to be an occasion of greater benefit to you, too. Since, then, this is what this kind of debt is like, the more we pay back the more we increase our wealth according to our greater repayment—come now, let us teach you also the basis of the debt so that you in your turn may more enthusiastically receive what we say, accept our readiness to make repayment, and reward us by attending to our words with enthusiasm.

(3) What, then, is the basis of our debt? You remember clearly that we brought to your attention the story of the patriarch—the journey he took down into Egypt on account of the famine, the abduction of Sarah perpetrated by Pharaoh, God's anger against him arising from his care for the just man, against him and all his household, care shown by lead-

2. Rom 13.8.

ing the patriarch to make the return journey from Egypt with great wealth. "Pharaoh gave his men instructions about Abram," the text says, remember, "to escort him and his wife, all his possessions, and Lot with him. Now, Abram left Egypt with his wife and all his possessions and Lot in his company, and he went into the desert."³ At that point we cut short the sermon, and altered the topic by devoting all the intervening days to instruction on subjects relevant to the occasion. Hence our task today is to link up with the sequel and to join the verses yet to be read to what has already been commented on, like fitting together one whole body; this is the way, you see, that our treatment of the subject will be easily taken in by you.

(4) For our words to be clearer to you, however, it would be worth our while also proposing to your good selves the very beginning of today's reading. The text reads: "Now, Abram was very rich in cattle, silver and gold. He journeyed to where he had come from, into the desert as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had formerly been, between Bethel and Haggai, to the place of the altar which he had made there in the beginning. [307] Then Abram called on the name of the Lord God." Let us not rush idly by this reading, but rather recognize clearly the precision of Sacred Scripture in recounting nothing to us as of no importance. "Now, Abram was very rich," the text says. Consider first of all this very fact that its habit had been to convey nothing idly or to no purpose, nor in this case is it without reason that it calls him rich: nowhere else had it made mention of his being rich—this was the first time. Why, and to what purpose? For you to learn the inventiveness of God's wisdom and providence displayed in favor of the good man, as well as his boundless and extraordinary power. The man who had gone into exile in Egypt under the pressure of famine, unable to sustain the privations of Canaan, suddenly became rich—and not just rich but very rich, not only in cattle but also in silver and gold.

3. Gen 12.20-13.1.

(5) Do you see the extent of God's providence? Abram left to find relief from famine, and came back not simply enjoying relief from famine but invested with great wealth and untold reputation, his identity well-known to everyone: now the inhabitants of Canaan gained a more precise idea of the good man's virtue by seeing this sudden transformation that had taken place—the stranger who had gone down into Egypt as a refugee and vagabond now flush with so much wealth. Notice how he had not become less resolute or devoted under the influence of great prosperity or the abundance of wealth, but rather he pressed on once more to that place where he had formerly been before going down into Egypt. "He went into the desert," the text says, "to the place where his tent had formerly been, to the place of the altar which he had made there in the beginning. He called on the name of the Lord God." Consider, I ask you, how he was a lover of peace and quiet, and was constantly attentive to divine worship. The text says, remember, that he went down to that place where he had previously built the altar; by calling on the name of God he already right from the very beginning fulfilled in anticipation that saying of David, "I would rather be of no account in the house of my God than take up residence in sinners' dwellings."⁴ In other words, solitude turned out to be preferred by him for invoking the name of God, instead of the cities. After all, he well knew that cities' greatness is not constituted by beauty of buildings nor by multitude of inhabitants, but by the virtue of the residents—hence too the desert proved to be more desirable than the cities, adorned as it was by the just man's virtue and thus a more resplendent vision than the whole world.

(6) "Lot, who accompanied Abram," the text goes on, "had flocks, herds and cattle. The countryside could not manage to support their living together, since their company was numerous, and they could not dwell together."⁵ Not only had there been an increase in wealth in the patriarch's favor, but "Lot too had flocks, herds and cattle." Perhaps on the one

4. Ps 84.10.

5. Gen 13.5-6.

hand Abram, being generous, was in the habit of favoring his nephew with these things, while on the other hand other people would supply him with them out of regard for the patriarch. "The countryside could not support them," the text says, "because their company was numerous." Notice the abundance of their possessions proving at once responsible for their separation, creating a division, sundering their harmony, and undoing the bond of kinship. "Trouble developed between Abram's herdsmen and Lot's herdsmen. Now, the Canaanites and the Pherezites inhabited the land at the time."⁶ Notice how the relatives [308] are responsible for the first signs of separation: invariably this is the source from which spring all problems—discord among brethren. The text says, remember, "Trouble developed between the herdsmen." They are the ones who provide the occasion for separation, who sunder the harmony, who give evidence of bad feeling. "Now, the Canaanites and the Pherezites inhabited the land at that time." Why did it mention that to us? Because it had said that, "the countryside could not manage to support their living together," Sacred Scripture wanted to teach us the reason why it could not support them, namely, because it was still occupied by these peoples.

(7) But let us see the patriarch's godfearing attitude quenching by his characteristic restraint the fire that threatened to break out. "Abram, however, said to Lot, 'Let there be no trouble between you and me, nor between my herdsmen and yours, for we are brothers.'"⁷ See the extraordinary degree of his humility, see the height of his wisdom: the elder, the senior, addresses his junior and calls his nephew "brother," admits him to the same rank as himself and retains no special distinction for himself; instead, he says, "'Let there be no trouble between you and me, nor between my herdsmen and yours.'" Nor would it be proper, after all, for this to happen, he says, since we are brothers. Do you see him fulfilling the apostolic law, which says, "Already, then, the verdict has completely gone against you for having lawsuits with one

6. Gen 13.7.

7. Gen 13.8.

another. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? Instead, you do wrong and defraud, and this to your own brethren."⁸ All these admonitions the patriarch observes in fact by saying, "'Let there be no trouble between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, because we are brothers.'"⁹ What could be more peace-loving than such a spirit as this? It wasn't idly, of course, or to no purpose that I mentioned at the outset that his reason for preferring solitude to the whole civilized world was a love for peace and quiet. See him in this case, too, when he noticed the herdsmen completely at odds, how right from the very beginning he tried to quench the fire that threatened to break out, and put a stop to the rivalry. You see, it was important for him in his role of teacher of wisdom sent to the inhabitants of Palestine, far from providing any bad example or offering any encouragement, rather to give them all the clearer instruction through the clarion call of his restraint in manners and to convert them into imitators of his own virtue.

(8) "'Let there be no trouble,'" he says, "'between you and me, between my herdsmen and yours, for we are brothers.'" Remarkable restraint in those words, "'between you and me.'" Notice how he addresses Lot on terms of equality—and yet I have the impression that the outbreak of trouble had no other origin than in the refusal of the patriarch's herdsmen to allow Lot's to enjoy the same privilege as they. The just man, however, handles everything with restraint, demonstrating the remarkable degree of his own good sense, and teaching not only those present at the time but also everyone in future never to settle our differences with our relatives by feuding. Their squabbling brings great disgrace on us, and instead of the trouble being attributed to them, the blame reverts to us. So what fittingness could there be for brothers, sharing in fact the same nature, the same links of kinship and [309] due at that point to dwell near to each other, to engage in hostilities when it was expected of them to play the role of

8. 1 Cor 6.7–8.

9. This time Chrysostom quotes the verse in a slightly different LXX text.

teaching all these people restraint, gentleness and complete good sense? Let people who judge they are above such reproach give heed to this example when on the grounds of relationship they connive at their relatives' larceny, rapacity, scheming beyond measure, both in the city and in the country, confiscation of one person's farm and another's home, and on that basis they show such scoundrels even greater favor. I mean, even if the felony was the work of someone else, still you shared personally in the guilt of the crime, not only by taking satisfaction in the deed and considering your own stocks to be increased by it and your wealth to grow greater, but also in not preventing the crime that was about to take effect. After all, the person who is in a position to forestall the criminal and does not do it is no less liable to punishment than the criminal.

(9) Far from deceiving ourselves, therefore, I beseech you, let us personally shun larceny, rapacity and the temptation to add to our wealth from these sources, and let us teach our relatives not to commit this kind of thing. In fact, instead of leaving us free of guilt, this would bring us heavier condemnation: to win our favor these people betray their own salvation by committing a crime, thus involving us in their own ruin. If, however, we are prepared to be on the alert and we disentangle ourselves from the ensuing disaster, we will also extricate them from the evil venture. Don't, pray, address to me those frivolous words, "That's got nothing to do with me; I've cheated no one, have I? I had no idea! Someone else committed the crime, I took no part in it." That's pretext and excuses. If you want to prove you had no part in the crime, that you weren't an accomplice, and didn't take the role of an agent of rapacity, repair the damage, solace the victim, restore what has been stolen. This, you see, is the way to clear yourself of charges and reform the culprit, by showing that the crimes committed by him were contrary to your intention, and by comforting the victim you will not allow him to be overwhelmed by the depression that he would likely succumb to owing to the robbery.

(10) "Let there be no trouble," the text reads, "between

me and you, and between my herdsmen and yours, for we are brothers.'" Do you see the mild manner? do you see the restraint? Listen as well to the sequel so as to come to know the extraordinary degree of his good sense. How, then, was the threat of trouble put to rest and the outbreak of hostility quenched? "'Lo, all the land lies before you. Part from me; if you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left.'"¹⁰ Notice our hero's good sense and the extent of his deference. Prior to this, however, dearly beloved, consider, I ask you, how great is the harm ensuing from wealth and the disagreement from great prosperity: their flocks grew bigger, great wealth accrued to them, and immediately harmony between them was disrupted—where there had been peace and the bonds of affection, now there was trouble and hostility. You see, whenever it is a question of mine and yours, there are grounds for the utmost trouble and a basis for hostility; by contrast, where this isn't the case, habits of peace and harmony exist together without any confusion.

(11) To grasp this, listen to what blessed Luke says about those embracing the faith from the beginning: "They all had one heart and one soul,"¹¹ he says, not that they all had one soul (how could they, after all, being in different bodies?), but because they give us an example of the most highly developed harmony. Had the good man not been most longsuffering and skilled in practicing good sense, he would have lost his temper and [310] said to Lot, What is the meaning of such frenzy? Your kindred haven't dared raise their voice against my retainers, have they? Have they not considered the distance between us? I mean, what is the cause of your prosperous circumstances? Is it not my provident care? But who thrust you into public notice? Was it not I who took pride of place in your regard, and acted as a father to you in every respect? Is this the reward you bestow on me for the great attention I have showered on you? Was this what I could expect for bringing you everywhere with me? All right, granted

10. Gen 13.9.

11. Acts 14.32.

you have in mind none of the things that have come your way at my hands: should you not at least have shown regard for my age and respected my grey hairs? Instead, you took no notice of your herdsmen debauching my herdsmen, all heedless of the fact that as resentment against them reverted to me, so their froward behavior would be turned home to you.

(12) None of this, however, did the just man deign to allow to enter his mind; rather, rejecting any such thought, his single concern was how to quench the hostility threatening to flare up, and how he might arrange their dwelling without any trouble by devising a separation free from recrimination. "Lo," he said, "does not all the land lie before you? Part from me; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left; if you go to the left, I'll go to the right."¹² See the just man's restraint: he shows Lot by his behavior that far from doing this by choice or out of a wish for them to be parted, it was rather under pressure of hostility and for the purpose of avoiding a continual feud in the household. Consider how, by means of his words, he allays the ill feeling, giving Lot complete right of choice and offering him all the territory in the words, "Lo, does not all the land lie before you?" Choose whatever you wish, and I will be ready with great contentment to accept the part you have left for me. Tremendous wisdom on the just man's part: in every way he tries to be no burden to his nephew. His meaning is, after all, Since what I didn't want has taken place—the need for a parting of the ways so as to allay the outbreak of hostility—accordingly I give you prior right of choice and confer on you complete authority so that you may choose whatever land you decide is more desirable and leave the rest to me. Did anyone ever deign to do as much for a very brother of his own, such as the patriarch was shown to do in favor of his nephew? Even if he, for his part, had taken the initiative in exercising his choice, and after choosing the principal portion had permitted the other man what was left over, would it not have been a great thing done even in this manner? Yet, on the contrary, he wanted to show the

12. Again Chrysostom recalls his text inexactly.

extent of his virtue and satisfy the young man's desire so that he should have no grounds for resentment from the separation; so he completely ceded the right in the words, "'Lo, all the land lies before you; part from me'" and choose whatever you wish.

(13) Accordingly, it behooved the nephew, who had experienced such restraint, to show respect for the patriarch in return, and cede to him the exercise of choice. You see, it is usual with practically all of us, whenever we see our opponents at the point of concocting some stratagem against us or struggling to usurp pride of place, not to allow ourselves to be bettered or give way to them. On the other hand, whenever we see them giving ground and conceding every right to us in conciliatory terms, out of regard for their great restraint we desist from hostility and reverse our position by ceding them every right, even if the person at odds with us seems inferior. Accordingly, Lot, too, should have behaved this way [311] in regard to the patriarch, yet on account of his youth and being a prey to waxing greed he usurped what he thought to be the best parts and made his choice on that basis. The text goes on, "Lot looked about and saw that all the region of the Jordan was well-watered, up as far as Zo-gora (this was before God's destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah), like the garden of God and like the land of Egypt. Lot chose for himself all the region of the Jordan; he moved off from the east, and the brothers parted from each other."¹³ Do you see the extraordinary degree of the just man's virtue in not allowing the root of the trouble to grow; instead, at once he dug out the weed about to flourish and destroyed it. By employing great restraint and demonstrating unspeakable contempt of other things for the sake of virtue, did he not show everyone how peace and freedom from hostility are in fact more estimable than all his wealth?

(14) I mean, in case anyone should condemn the just man for proving ill-disposed towards Lot or believe he uprooted him from his home, led him into foreign parts and now

13. Gen 13.10-11.

drives him from his new home, or think he does this out of enmity, instead of our all learning that it is under the impulse of peace that he does it, he even yielded the choice to Lot and made no objection when he chose the prime land, so that everyone would be in a position to know the goodness of our hero's attitude and the object of his peaceable disposition. Another wonderful design in particular had been provided for so that many good effects might follow from his example, namely, that Lot might be taught through the events that it had not been proper for him to make the choice, that the people of Sodom might come to know Lot's virtue, and that despite the separation the promise made to the patriarch might take effect as the words said, "To you and your descendants I will give this land." We shall see this as we gradually proceed, Sacred Scripture making everything clear.

(15) "Abram stayed in the land of Canaan," the text goes on, "whereas Lot settled in the cities of the region, pitching his tent in Sodom. Now, the people of Sodom were very wicked sinners in God's sight."¹⁴ Do you observe Lot having regard only for the nature of the land and not considering the wickedness of the inhabitants? What good, after all, is fertility of land and abundance of produce when the inhabitants are evil in their ways? On the other hand, what harm could come from solitude and a simple lifestyle when the inhabitants are more restrained? The summit of blessings, you see, is the uprightness of those who dwell in a place. Lot, however, had eyes for one thing only, the richness of the countryside. Hence Scripture's desire to indicate to us the wickedness of those who dwelt there in the words, "Now, the people of Sodom were very wicked sinners in God's sight"; not merely "wicked" but also "sinners," and not simply "sinners" but also "in God's sight," that is, the extent of their sins was extreme and their wickedness superabounded—hence it added as well, "very wicked in God's sight." Do you see the extremity of the evil? Do you see how great an evil it is to usurp pride of place and not to consider what is for the com-

14. Gen 13.12-13.

mon good? Do you see what a great thing is deference, ceding pride of place, taking second place? Take note, in fact: as the instruction develops we shall see that the one who took the pick of the best places gained no advantage from it, whereas he who chose the lesser became more resplendent day by day [312] and, with his wealth increasing, he became the attraction of all eyes.

(16) Lest we prolong the sermon to great length, however, let us terminate it at this point and postpone the sequel to next time while giving you this exhortation, to imitate the patriarch by never aspiring after the first places but rather heeding blessed Paul's words, "outdoing one another in respect,"¹⁵ especially our superiors, and being anxious to take second place in everything. This, in fact, means filling first place, as Christ himself said, "'Whoever humbles himself will be exalted.'"¹⁶ So what could parallel this, when by ceding pride of place to others we ourselves enjoy greater esteem, and by showing them special honor we bring ourselves into the highest honor? Accordingly, I beseech you, let this be our particular concern, to imitate the patriarch's humility, and by following in the steps of this man who displayed such wonderful good sense before the time of the Law, let us, who enjoy grace itself, advance in virtue. It really is, in fact, a genuine instance of humility that this remarkable man gave in regard to the person far inferior to himself, not only on the score of virtue but also of age and all other respects. Consider, after all, that the elder man gave way to the younger, the uncle to the nephew, and the recipient of such wonderful favor from God to the one who so far had nothing worthwhile to show for himself; what the latter should have said as befitting a younger man addressing his senior and his own uncle, this the patriarch said to his junior.

(17) So let us in our turn show signs of respect not only for our superiors or those who happen to be our equals. This, you see, would not be humility; whenever you do what is imposed by necessity, it is not humility but duty. True humility

15. Rom 12.10.

16. Luke 14.11; 18.14.

it is, on the contrary, when we defer to those who seem to be our inferiors and give pride of place to those judged to be of much lower estate. If we view these things aright, however, far from judging anyone to be our inferior we shall consider all people our superiors. I say this not in the light of our condition of being overwhelmed by countless failings; rather, even if someone is convinced of his good deeds beyond number, unless the conviction he has about himself is that he is the last of all, he would gain no benefit from all his good deeds. This, you see, is humility, when someone has grounds for complacency but lowers and humbles himself and keeps pride in check. Then, in fact, he will reach true heights, according to the promise of the Lord in the words, "Whoever humbles himself will be exalted." Accordingly, I beseech you, let us all take every effort to reach the heights that are scaled by humility so that we may enjoy from the Lord the same favor as that just man Abram and be accorded those ineffable blessings, thanks to the grace and loving kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, power and honor, now and forever, for ages of ages. Amen.

HOMILY 34

*"The Lord said to Abram after Lot's parting from him, 'Lift up your eyes, and from where you now are look north and south, east and west: all the land you see I will give you.'"*¹



ESTERDAY, [312] DEARLY BELOVED, you learnt of the patriarch's extraordinary humility, you saw the remarkable degree [313] of his restraint. It was no slight thing for the old man, who had performed so many good deeds and enjoyed so much favor from the Lord of all, to display towards the younger man, his nephew, such equality of esteem as to cede to him pride of place and take second best, and put up with everything for the sake of heading off conflict and eliminating the grounds of rivalry. Let us all be anxious to emulate this conduct, never threatening our relatives nor entertaining grandiose notions; let us give evidence of deep humility by deferring to them, let us rather make it our concern to take second place in behavior and speech, not even reacting against those who do us wrong, even if they happen to be beneficiaries of ours (this, after all, is the most excellent philosophy), nor even being provoked by their arrogance, even if those feuding with us are our inferiors—rather, let us allay their ill feeling by restraint and meekness.

(2) Nothing, you see, is more efficacious than this, nothing is more potent. This brings our soul into lasting tranquility, as if causing it to find haven in port, and proving to be for us the basis of complete repose. Hence Christ too delivered that divine instruction in the words, "Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls."² Nothing, you see, brings the soul into repose and great peace to such an extent as meekness and humility. This

1. Gen 13.14–15.

2. Matt 11.29.

would prove to be for its possessor more valuable than any diadem, this would be more to one's credit than any notoriety or glory. I mean, what could be more desirable than being freed from the threat of conflict arising within one's own person? I mean, even if we enjoy peace and respect many times over outwardly while alarm and disturbance arise within us from the tumult of our thinking, no benefit comes to us from peace on the outside—just as nothing would be more pitiable than a city suffering the treason of the citizens within its walls, no matter if you fortified it with countless ramparts and fortifications.

(3) Accordingly, I beseech you, let us make this our special concern, to keep our soul undisturbed, to bring it to a state of peace, to free it from all alarm so that we ourselves may enjoy complete repose and may be gentle with our acquaintances. This, in fact, is a particular mark of the person endowed with reason: mildness, restraint, gentleness, humility, tranquillity, not being pulled and tugged like a slave either by anger or by the other passions, but through the use of reason prevailing over interior impulses, preserving our natural nobility and not falling victim to the frenzy of brute beasts through indifference. To learn the power of gentleness and restraint, and how virtue alone suffices to render the person who practices it devotedly worthy of those ineffable encomiums, listen to the eulogy bestowed to blessed Moses on that account, and the crown awarded him for that reason: "Moses was the mildest of all people on the earth,"³ Scripture says. Do you see the greatness of the encomium, which conferred on him equality of esteem with the whole human race—or, rather, gave him precedence over all mankind? Again, Scripture says about David, "Be mindful, Lord, of David and all his meekness."⁴ On that score, too, the patriarch won much greater favor from on high, and by exerting himself from his own resources he was accorded greater blessings from the loving Lord. You will come to realize this when we propose to you the sequel [314] to yesterday's words and unfold for

3. Num 12.3.

4. Ps 132.1.

your good selves the passage read at the outset. You see, when Abram gave evidence of great restraint in giving pride of place to Lot and yielded to him the right of choice, he willingly chose second place for the sake of avoiding all rivalry; hence notice the extent of the reward he immediately enjoys from God and the way he regales the patriarch with recompense in excess of his considerable wealth. This, you see, is what our Lord is like: when he sees us exerting ourselves even slightly of our own accord, he plies us with generous rewards on his account, and demonstrates such great generosity as to surpass by a great margin what has been done by us.

(4) You will find this done by him in each of the works accomplished by us. I mean, what, tell me, could be more worthless than two pennies? Yet despite that, he caused that widow who made an offering of the two pennies to be celebrated from that time to this all over the world.⁵ Why do I say two pennies? If you give only a cup of cold water, even for that he will award great recompense, always rewarding for their intention those who practice virtue.⁶ You could see this done by him also in the case of the offering of prayers: if someone prays with fervor, immediately he will say to him, "While you were yet sleeping, lo, I was at your side."⁷ If, however, one gives evidence of greater insistence and earnestly offers petitions with great desire and ardent zeal, he likewise exalts and rewards him for his petition. This he did also in the case of the Canaanite woman;⁸ when he saw her great persistence and constancy, he first of all exalted and, so to say, crowned her with commendation, making her famous throughout the whole world; then with great generosity he surpassed the extravagance of her petition, saying to her, "'O woman, great is your faith.' Then he added, 'May your wish be granted.'"⁹ If we wanted to single out every example of the holy Scriptures, in every case we would see the Lord's

5. Cf. Luke 21.1-3.

7. Isa 65.24.

9. Matt 15.28. This is proving to be a typically wide-ranging scriptural introduction to the day's theme.

6. Cf. Matt 10.42.

8. Cf. Matt 15.22-28.

great generosity. The patriarch had a precise understanding of that: well aware that the person giving way in unimportant matters would be better off in matters of greater consequence, as you heard yesterday, he yielded to Lot and chose for himself the worse region so as to remove the grounds of rivalry, demonstrate his own virtue and leave the whole family in peace.

(5) But let us see from what has just been read what reward he receives from the Lord for such restraint. "God said to Abram," the text says, "after Lot's parting from him, 'Lift up your eyes, and from where you now are look north and south, east and west; all the land you see I will give to you and your descendants forever.'" See the promptness of God's providential recompense demonstrated in favor of the good man: Sacred Scripture wants to teach us the extent of the reimbursement the patriarch was accorded for such humility from the loving God, and so after saying that Lot took his leave and went off to the land he had selected on the score of its beauty, it immediately added, "The Lord God said to Abram." Then, for our precise realization that he said this by way of rewarding him for what had been done for Lot, it added, "God said to Abram after Lot's parting from him," [315] as if to say the following words to him without demur, You ceded the beautiful region to your nephew on account of your great restraint and thus gave evidence of your eminent humility and showed such concern for peace as to put up with anything for the sake of preventing any rivalry coming between you—hence accept from me a generous reward. "'Lift up your eyes,'" he said, "'and from where you are now look north and south, east and west; all the land you see I will give to you and your descendants forever.'" Do you see the recompense exceeding in great measure what had been done by Abram? The loving Lord uses the same words as Abram himself in his act of deference: as he had said, "'Lo, does not all the land lie before you? Part from me; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left; if you go to the left, I'll go right,'" so the Lord said, "'Lift up your eyes, and from where you now are, lo, all the land you see I will give to you and your descendants forever.'"

(6) Observe in this instance the extraordinary degree of his generosity: whereas you gave him the right of choice (he is saying), ceding the region he wished to take for himself while being content for your part to accept what was left over, I am displaying such generosity as to hand over to you all the land that falls under your gaze on all sides, north and south, east and west—all the land you see; and not only this but also “to your descendants forever.” Do you see the generosity worthy of God’s goodness? do you see how Abram was granted as much as he had conceded? Let us learn from this incident to show great generosity in almsgiving so that we may be granted great rewards in return for giving meager alms. I mean, what parity is there, tell me, between giving a little money and winning remission of sins? Between feeding the hungry and enjoying confidence on that dread day and hearing those words that earn right of entry to the kingdom, “I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat”?¹⁰ The one who showed you such generosity was not beyond alleviating that person’s need, was he? His reason, however, for allowing him to be afflicted by need was that he might win great reward for his endurance and you might store up for yourself confidence on the basis of almsgiving.

(7) Do you see the Lord’s loving kindness, how he arranges everything with our salvation in mind? So when you consider that it is for you and your welfare that that person is beset with want and perishing from starvation, don’t pass him by heartlessly, but prove a faithful steward of what has been entrusted to you by the Lord so that by alleviating the poor person’s need you may win such favor from on high. And praise the Lord for allowing that person to live in need for the sake of you and your salvation in order that you may be able to find the way to be in a position both to wash away your sins and by managing properly what has been entrusted to you by the Lord to be accorded that commendation which exceeds all thought and description. You will hear, in fact, “Well done, good and faithful servant, you have been faithful

10. Matt 15:35.

in a few things, I will set you over many; enter into the joy of your Lord.”¹¹ Understanding this, let us look on the poor as our benefactors, able to afford us the basis of our salvation, and let us give with generosity and a joyful spirit, never being tardy in our offering, but conversing with them with great restraint and showing great meekness. “Incline [316] your ear to a beggar,” remember, “and respond peaceably to him in meekness”¹² so that even before your gift, you may lift his spirit from the dejection of great need with the gentleness of your words. Scripture says, remember, “a kind word is better than an offering”;¹³ so speech is able both to lift the spirit and bring it much comfort.

(8) Accordingly, let us not simply have the recipient in view in showing generosity in almsgiving, but consider who it is who takes as his the kindnesses shown to the poor person and who promises recompense for favors done; and thus let us direct our attention to him while showing all zeal in making offerings with complete enthusiasm, and let us sow generously in season so that we may also reap generously. Scripture says, remember, “he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly.”¹⁴ Let us consequently sow these good seeds with no sparing hand so that in due season we may reap generously. Now, after all, is the time for sowing, which I beseech you not to pass by, so that on the day of harvesting the returns of what was sown here we may gather the fruits and be regaled with loving kindness from the Lord. Nothing, you see, nothing else of our virtuous deeds will so succeed in quenching the fire of our sins as generosity in almsgiving: it causes the remission of our sins, proves the guarantee of confidence for us and ensures the enjoyment of those ineffable goods.

(9) This is enough talking, however, to encourage you and to show you that by giving alms, meager though they be, we receive great rewards from the Lord. By this stage, you see, the sermon has gone to an exhortation in almsgiving because,

11. Matt 15.23.

12. Sir 4.8.

13. Sir 18.16.

14. 2 Cor 9.6. Chrysostom is still skirting around the day's theme with his allusions to other parts of Scripture.

as you recall, we told you that the patriarch ceded part of the country to Lot, letting him have the most beautiful area in the region while taking the worst land for himself, and so he was accorded such generosity from God that the promise made him by God surpassed all thought and imagination. The text says, remember, “‘Lift up your eyes, and from where you are, lo, all the land you see to north and south, I will give to you and your descendants forever.’” You ceded part of the country to your nephew, he says; lo, I promise you the entire country—and not only this, but also I guarantee to give it to your descendants, and forever, or in other words in perpetuity. Do you see how he outdoes himself in his benefactions? Since he knew that the patriarch longed for this in particular, and that nothing else would so arouse his enthusiasm, he said, This favor, too, I will bestow upon you—that those descended from you will succeed to possession of the land and will have control over it in perpetuity.

(10) Then in case Abram should have regard only to his own condition, his advanced years and Sarah’s sterility, and thus lose confidence in the promise instead of trusting in the power of the one making the promise, he said, “‘I will make your descendants as numerous as all the grains of sand in the world; if anyone can number the grains of sand in the world, your descendants too will be numbered.’”¹⁵ No doubt the promise went beyond human nature; not only did he promise to make him a father despite so many impediments but also to extend the gift to such a multitude as to be compared with all the grains of sand in the world, and the multitude to be beyond number, wishing as he did to demonstrate the extent of the remarkable increase by the comparison. [317] Notice how the loving Lord gradually exercises the just man’s virtue. After saying previously, “‘I will give this land to your descendants,’” he now says in turn, “‘I will give it to your descendants forever, and I will make them as numerous as all the grains of sand in the world.’” For the time being the reality of the promise extended only to words, and much time would

15. Gen 13.16.

elapse in the meantime, the purpose being that we might learn the godfearing quality of the patriarch's attitude and the extraordinary power of God. You see, the delay and postponement was intentional, so that those in receipt of the promise might reach extreme old age and, so to say, lose all hope for the time being according to human logic, and only then have the experience of their own limitations and come to recognize the remarkable degree of God's ineffable power.

(11) Now, consider, I ask you, in this disposition of time the resoluteness of the patriarch's attitude in bypassing all human considerations, directing his thinking to the power of the person who made the promise and not being alarmed or concerned. I mean, you know how, when someone makes a promise on one or two occasions without ever putting into effect what was promised we become less enthusiastic about placing any further trust in the person making the promise. While, however, this would be possible in the case of human beings, yet with God, who manages our affairs with great wisdom, once he promises—no matter if countless obstacles interpose—we should have regard for the greatness of God's power and keep our spirits up, our resolve strengthened, and know that the words spoken by him will without fail take effect. There is nothing, you see, which will ever succeed in frustrating his promises—he is God, after all, with whom all things are possible, and hence he directs affairs in the direction he wishes, being able to find ways where there are none and, despite our despairing, leading us to sound hopes so that in this way we may learn the extraordinary degree of his inventive wisdom. “‘Arise,’” he said, you see, “‘and travel through the length and breadth of the country, because I am going to give it to you.’”¹⁶ See how in every development he aims at instilling in the just man a deep sense of security: Arise, he says, travel about and get to know the size of the country you are about to occupy, and so that you may enjoy great satisfaction, buoyed up by the prospect of occupation. You see, I am going to give you as much land as you traverse,

16. Gen 13.17.

so that you may realize that you did not give up as much as you are now about to receive. So don't think the worse part was left to you when Lot usurped what seemed the prime areas. On the contrary, before long you will know by the way things turn out that his choice of the prime areas was not to his advantage; and he will come to realize for himself what a mistake it was to set his heart on those prime areas. For the present, however, take possession of the reward of the humility and restraint you showed to your nephew, accept the promise, and now get to know all the land of which you are ruler, and which before long you and your descendants will possess in perpetuity. "'And to your descendants forever,'" he said, remember.

(12) Wonderful the extent of the promise; remarkable the depths of generosity of the Lord of us all; extraordinary the degree of the reward conferred by him in his mercy and love on this blessed man and on the descendants destined to be born to him! Hearing this and amazed at God's unspeakable goodness, the patriarch "struck camp and moved on until settling [318] at the oak of Mambre which is at Chebron."¹⁷ After accepting the promise, the text is saying, and following Lot's parting, he changed his camp site to the vicinity of the oak of Mambre. Notice his sensible attitude, his high sense of responsibility in effecting the transfer with ease and making no difficulty of changing from place to place. I mean, you will not find him shackled and hidebound by any custom, something which frequently affects a great number of people, even those considered wise and those generally free of concerns: should the occasion require them to change and move in a different direction, even in many cases for a spiritual matter, you would find them troubled, beside themselves, regretting the change on account of their being prisoners of habit. The just man, on the other hand, wasn't like that: he showed good sense from the very outset, and like a stranger or pilgrim he moved from here to there and from there to the next place, and in all cases his concern was to give evidence of his godfearing attitude in his actions.

17. Gen 13.18.

(13) You see, when he changed his camp to the vicinity of the terebinth grove of Mambre, immediately "he built an altar there to the Lord."¹⁸ Do you see his sense of gratitude? I mean, once he set up camp, without delay he made an offering in thanksgiving for the promise made to him. On each spot where he made camp you will find him preoccupied with this concern above all, building an altar, offering prayers, and fulfilling the apostolic law bidding us pray in every place with pious hands raised on high.¹⁹ Do you see his soul carried aloft to the love of God and proving grateful for all his favors? Far from waiting for the promises to take effect, he even gives thanks and does all in his power to give evidence of gratitude for the favor ahead of time and thus to encourage his Lord to fulfill his promises.

(14) Let us also imitate and trust in God's promises, not allowing time to undermine our resolve, nor any obstacles to intervene in the meantime to weaken our determination. Trusting instead in God's power as if we already had before our eyes the revelation of the promises, let us give evidence of unalloyed faith. Extraordinarily great, you see, are the promises the Lord has made to us, too, surpassing our imagination—I mean enjoyment of the kingdom, a share in those ineffable goods, life with angels, escape from hell. On the other hand, let us never lose confidence because these things are not visible to bodily eyes; rather, let us consider the fidelity of the one promising and the greatness of his power, and thus view them with the eyes of faith and on the basis of what has already been given let us maintain sound hope in what is to come. The reason, after all, that we have been blessed with many favors here is that we may be encouraged by the former to have confidence in the latter. He who gave his own son out of love for us, how will he not grant us everything else? As Paul also says, "He who did not spare his own son but handed him over for us all, how will he not grant us everything else as well along with him?"²⁰ If he gave his son for us sinners, if

18. Ibid.

20. Rom 8.3.

19. Cf. 1 Tim 2.8.

he favored us with the gift of baptism, if he granted us forgiveness of previous sins, if he laid down for us a way of penance, if he devised countless other means to our salvation, [319] clearly he will provide the good things stored up for us in the time to come. After all, he who prepared these things before our coming into existence out of his characteristic goodness, how will he not grant us also enjoyment of them? I mean, for proof that he did prepare these good things for us in advance, listen to his words to those standing on his right: "Come, you who enjoy my Father's blessing, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you before the beginning of the world."²¹ Do you see the excess of goodness, the great degree of loving kindness he displays towards the human race in preparing for us enjoyment of the kingdom even before the beginning of the world?

(15) Let us therefore not prove ungrateful nor render ourselves unworthy of such wonderful gifts, but rather love our Lord as we ought and do nothing to impair his favorable regard for us. After all, it wasn't we ourselves who initiated the process, was it? He took the initiative in displaying towards us his great love beyond all telling. So would it not be absurd for us not to love as far as lies in our power the one who loves us so much? You see, for love of us he endured everything without demur, being torn as it were from the paternal bosom and willing to take on the form of a slave,²² passing through every human experience, submitting to abuse and indignity at the hands of Jews, and finally accepting the cross, the most shameful death, so that he might set us free through faith in him as we go crawling on the earth and weighed down with countless burden of sins. All this, in fact, blessed Paul had in mind, that fervent lover of Christ, who like a winged bird traversed the whole world, who in his zeal gave evidence of the faculties of incorporeal creatures, though in bodily form himself, and thus minded he shouted aloud, "The love of

21. Matt 25:34.

22. Cf. Phil 2:6-7, introducing a catena of Pauline texts that illustrate his regard and fellow-feeling for the Apostle.

Christ, you see, constrains us."²³ See his uprightness, see the extraordinary degree of his virtue, see his fervent love. "The love of Christ," he says, "constrains us," that is, urges, impels, coerces us. Then, wishing to explain what had been said by him, he says, "convinced of this, that if one person died for all, then all have died, he did die for all so that the living might live no longer for themselves but for the one who died and rose for them."²⁴ Do you see how appropriate it was for him to say, "The love of Christ constrains us"? He is saying, you see, If he died for the sake of us all, he died for the purpose that we the living might live no longer for ourselves but for him who died and rose for us.

(16) Accordingly, let us heed the apostolic exhortation, not living for ourselves but for him who died and rose for us. How, you might say, will we be able to avoid living for ourselves? Listen to this blessed man's words again: "Now, it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."²⁵ See how, while still striding the earth and clad in mortal flesh, he was in the condition of a dweller in heaven who lives in the company of incorporeal creatures. Hence he said further in another place, "Now, those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and lusts."²⁶ So this is what is meant by not living for ourselves but for the one who died and rose for us, when we are in this life like corpses and are not distracted by any visible realities. You see, the reason the Lord was crucified was that we might exchange this life for the next—or rather, that we might through this life earn the next for ourselves. The present life, after all, provided we are prepared to be sober and alert, leads us to the enjoyment of eternal [320] life; and we will be able, if we are willing to maintain some little vigilance and open wide our mind's eye, to keep alive in ourselves through every eventuality some understanding of the rest to be enjoyed there, and thus bypass and fly above visible realities while straining our attention to those of the next life that last forever. So this blessed man said by way

23. 2 Cor 5.14.

25. Gal 2.20.

24. 2 Cor 5.14–15.

26. Gal 5.24.

of instructing us, "The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me."²⁷

(17) See his ardent spirit, see his mind borne aloft on wings, see his imagination inflamed with love for God! "The life I now live," he says, "I live by faith." In other words, he says, Don't think I'm at work on some concern for the things of this present life; even if my condition is in the flesh and I am bound by the needs of nature, yet I live by faith, faith in Christ, spurning all present realities, bypassing everything through hope in him, and keeping my mind fixed on him. Then, for you to learn the excess of his love, he says, "I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me." Notice the extraordinary degree of his gratitude. What are you saying, O blessed Paul? A little earlier you said, "Who, far from sparing his own son, actually gave him up for us all,"²⁸ and now you say, "Who loved me"—are you claiming as your own the benefit meant for all? Yes, he says: even if the sacrifice was offered by him for the whole human race, yet on account of my love for him I claim the deed for my benefit. This was also the way the Old Testament authors spoke in saying, "O God, my God";²⁹ admittedly he is God of the whole world, but it is peculiar to love to claim as one's own what belongs to all. "By faith in the Son of God," he says, "who loved me." What are you saying? Did he love you alone? The whole human race, of course, he says, yet I owe him thanks just as if I alone was loved. "And who gave himself up for me." What now: was he crucified for you alone? Does he not say himself, "When I have been lifted up, I shall draw everyone to myself"? Didn't you yourself say, "He gave himself up for us all"? Yes, he replies; I am not contradicting myself in this, but confirming my love.

(18) Notice further something else he teaches us in these words: earlier he had said of the Father, "He gave him up for us all"; now he says, "He gave himself up." The former

²⁷. Gal 2.20.

²⁸. Rom 8.32.

²⁹. Cf. Pss 22; 118.

expression was intended to show the unity of thought and esteem between Father and Son, since he says in another place also, "Proved obedient to the point of death,"³⁰ in each case expressing his faith in the Passion.³¹ In the latter case, on the contrary, he employed the phrase "gave himself up" to show that he willingly embraced suffering, not acting out of necessity but from the wish and determination to take on the salvation of the whole human race, and so he endured the Cross. So what degree of love will we manage to demonstrate in a worthy manner towards him who has shown such rich love in our regard? I mean, even if we deign to expend our very soul in obeying his laws and observing the commands given by him, we would not even then succeed in reaching the measure of the love he showed for our nature. In his case, after all, it was a matter of God accepting this fate for the sake of human beings, and the master for his servants, and not simply for his servants but for those giving evidence of ingratitude and grossly implacable hostility. Whereas he took the initiative in [321] displaying such kindness towards those unworthy creatures so frequently remiss, we, on the contrary, will go to no great pains, whatever demonstration we are able to give, to make some return to the one who has taken the initiative in our regard by such wonderful acts of kindness. I mean, whatever comes from us, should it in fact follow eventually, is by way of response and indebtedness, whereas his actions are grace and favors, a wonderful degree of giftgiving.

(19) Consequently, with all this in mind let us love Christ as Paul loved him; far from allowing ourselves to take much account of present realities, let us constantly keep the love for him fixed firmly in our soul. This is the way, you see, to show scorn for everything of the present life, this is the way to live on earth as if in heaven, neither puffed up by successes here


30. Phil 2.8.

31. De Montfaucon suggests this translation of "Passion" for Chrysostom's *oikonomia*, normally used by him in the sense of "the divine plan": "*oikonomia* is taken to refer to the Incarnation when the sermon deals with Christ, but here it refers to the Passion, as emerges from what follows."

nor dejected by failures. Instead, we will pass by everything here and be carried up to the Lord as the object of our love, not troubled by the waiting itself but making our own the words of that blessed man, "The life we now live in the flesh we live by faith in the Son of God, who loved us and gave himself up for us," so that we may pass the present life without harm and be found worthy to enjoy the good things to come, thanks to the grace and loving kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, power and honor, now and forever, for ages of ages. Amen.

HOMILY 35

“Now, it happened that in the region of Amarthath king of Sennaar, Arioeh king of Alasar, Chodologomor king of Elam, and Tharthak king of the nations made war with the king of the Sodomites.”¹

 HE READING [321] OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES, dearly beloved, is a great blessing. This it is that arouses the soul to an appreciation of wisdom, this directs the mind to heaven, this brings the man to a thankful attitude, this prevents our getting excited over any earthly reality, this brings our thinking to rest in the world beyond and ourselves to do everything with a view to reward from the Lord and to deal with the trials of virtue with great readiness. From this source, you see, you can gain a precise understanding of the providence of God's prompt retribution, the fortitude of good people, the Lord's goodness and the greatness of his rewards. From this source you can be stirred to ardent imitation of noble men's good sense in not fainting under the struggles of virtue but rather maintaining hope in God's promises before their realization.

(2) Hence, I beseech you, let us practice the reading of the holy Scriptures with great zeal. This, after all, is the way to fortify our knowledge, too, if we are assiduous in applying ourselves to their contents. I mean, it is not possible for the person who is in touch with the divine message in a spirit of zeal and fervent desire ever to suffer neglect; rather, even should a human teacher not come our way, the Lord himself

1. Gen 14.1–2. Commentators generally highlight the unique character of ch. 14 for its digression into world history and its amount of puzzling analistic detail. Chrysostom has little antiquarian interest, and moves rapidly to Abraham and Melchizedek, so that—unusually—he deals with the whole chapter in one homily. Like his modern counterparts, however, he does feel the need to account for the atypical material.

would come from on high to enlighten our minds, shed light on our thinking, bring to our attention what had slipped our notice, and act as our instructor in what we have no knowledge of—provided we are prepared to contribute what lies in our power. Scripture says, remember, “Do not call anyone on earth your teacher.”² When therefore we take an inspired book in our hands, let us concentrate, collect our thoughts and dispel every worldly thought, and let us in this manner do our reading with great devotion, with great [322] attention so that we may be able to be led by the Holy Spirit towards the understanding of the writings and may gain great benefit from them.

(3) Even that pagan eunuch of the queen of Ethiopia,³ remember, despite being in all his glory and riding along in his chariot, did not neglect that opportunity for reading; instead, with the inspired author in his hand he put much effort into reading, even without understanding the contents. Nevertheless, because he brought to bear all that lay within him—his enthusiasm, his earnestness, his attention—he chanced upon a guide. Consider, I ask you, what a great effort it was not to neglect reading even while on a journey, and especially while seated in a chariot. Let this be heeded by those people who don’t even deign to do it at home but rather think reading the Scriptures is a waste of time: claiming as an excuse their living with a wife, conscription in military service, caring for children, attending to domestics, and looking after other concerns, they don’t think it necessary for them to show any interest in reading the holy Scriptures. I mean, look at the case of the eunuch, a pagan to boot, both facts sufficient to induce indifference in him, and as well as that his public image and abundance of wealth, plus the fact that he was on a journey and traveling in a chariot (after all, it’s not easy to pay attention to reading when you’re traveling like that—quite the contrary, it’s extremely difficult). Yet his desire and great enthusiasm made light of all these problems, and so he gave himself

2. Chrysostom’s textual variant of Matt 23.8.

3. Cf. Acts 8.26–40.

to reading without muttering the words many people mutter these days: I don't understand the contents, I can't grasp the full sense of the words, why should I go to this trouble all to no purpose by reading without having someone capable of guiding me?

(4) None of these considerations counted for anything with that man, barbarian in language though he was, yet sage in his thinking; instead, he judged that, provided he gave evidence of all that lay within his power, he would not be overlooked but would rapidly enjoy grace from on high, and so he gave himself to reading. Hence the loving Lord, seeing his desire, did not ignore him, did not leave him unprovided for, but immediately sent him a mentor. In your case, on the other hand, I ask you, consider God's wisdom in waiting for the man first of all to bring to bear his own resources and only then he demonstrated his characteristic assistance. Since, therefore, the eunuch had discharged himself of all his capabilities, then the angel of the Lord appeared to Philip and said, "'Up now, and travel to the road that leads down from Jerusalem to Gaza (a desert road).' Lo, an Ethiopian, eunuch and minister of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who had gone to worship at Jerusalem, was on the return journey seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah."⁴ See how precisely the writer of the book described things to us, saying "Ethiopian" so that we should know he was a barbarian; then he said "minister" to show he in fact enjoyed the highest rank and pomp. "Who had gone to worship at Jerusalem," he said: notice also the reason for his journey, sufficient to reveal his godfearing attitude of mind—I mean, how long a journey he undertakes so as to pay adoration to the Lord. You see, they were still of the mind that worship was conducted in one place only, and consequently traveled long distances to offer prayers there; for this reason, of course, he arrived at the place of the temple and [323] Jewish cult so as to pay adoration to the Lord.

(5) After putting into effect what he had longed to do, the

4. A précis of Acts 8.26–28.

text says, "he was on the return journey, seated in his chariot and reading." Then Philip approached him and said, "'Do you really understand what you're reading?'"⁵ Do you see his spirit of devotion, persisting with his reading while not understanding the contents, and anxious to chance upon a mentor to guide him? You see, the apostle straightway stimulates his longing by the question he asks; the fact that he deserved to meet someone to guide him towards understanding of the contents emerges from his very reply. I mean, when the apostle said, "'Do you really understand?'" and came close in his lowly condition, he was not put off, he made no objection, he did not consider himself disgraced in the way many foolish people react, often preferring to remain in unbroken ignorance through a sense of shame in admitting their ignorance and having to learn from those able to instruct them. This man, on the contrary, had none of those reactions; instead, he made his response with great restraint and discretion, showing his state of soul in the words, "'Well, how could I, unless someone shows me?'"⁶ Not only did he reply with restraint and continue on as well, but he showed us the virtue in his own behavior by issuing an invitation in those words—the minister, the barbarian, seated in his chariot, inviting the man of lowly mien, despicable in attire, to mount and ride with him. Do you see his enthusiasm of spirit? Do you see the extraordinary degree of his piety? Do you see the barbarian's godfearing attitude in fulfilling that saying of a certain wise man, "If you see a man of understanding, pay him an early visit, and let your foot wear out his doorstep?"⁷ Do you see how fitting it was he was not scorned? Do you see how fitting it was he enjoyed favor from on high? Do you see how he omitted nothing that was due to be performed on his part? For that reason he chanced upon his mentor at that point and gained a precise knowledge of the efficacy of Scripture's contents, shedding light on his mind.

(6) Have you noticed how great a good it is to practice the

5. Acts 8.30.

6. Acts 8.31.

7. Sir 6.36.

reading of the holy Scriptures with earnestness and zeal? The reason, in fact, that I have brought to your notice the story of this barbarian as well, is in case we are all ashamed to turn imitators of the Ethiopian, of the eunuch, of this person who did not neglect spiritual reading even on a journey. This barbarian is capable of proving a teacher of us all, those living a private life, those enlisted in military service, those who happen to be surrounded with pomp and circumstance, people in general, not only men also women as well, as much those who live the monastic life as those who spend all their time at home. From him we could learn that no time proves an obstacle to the reading of the divine sayings; rather, it is possible not only at home but also moving about in public, making a journey, being in the company of a crowd and involved in business affairs, to give oneself earnestly to these sayings so that by bringing our own resources to bear, we too may promptly chance upon a mentor. Our Lord, you see, discerning our enthusiasm for spiritual matters, far from ignoring us, supplies illumination from above and enlightens our mind. Accordingly, let us not neglect reading, I beseech you; rather, whether we recognize the efficacy of the contents [324] or are unaware of it, let us apply ourselves to it assiduously. Constant attention to it, after all, creates an indelible memory; and it often happens that what we could not discover today in our reading we all of a sudden come across the next day in returning to the task as the loving God in unseen fashion sheds light on our mind.

(7) Enough, however, of these present remarks of ours aimed at promoting your constant practice of the reading of the holy Scriptures. Listen to what is now said for you to learn, on the other hand, that in all other matters as well it is customary for the Lord, when we have contributed what we have to offer, to supply generously in his turn what comes from him, and that what he did in the case of Bible reading by dispatching with great promptness a mentor for the barbarian he likewise does in the case of people bent on practicing virtue. To make the point clearer for you, however, it would be appropriate to bring to your notice again the inci-

dent concerning the patriarch and to make the connection at this point with what was said yesterday. You know, of course, from what has already been said how for the great instance of humility that he showed in Lot's favor by yielding pride of place to him he enjoyed a great reward from above, receiving a promise surpassing in great measure what had been done on his part. Let us now see as well, however, from the words read today another instance of the just man's virtue, so that proceeding in this way we may discover God's unspeakable providence shown in his regard. You see, with the intention of instructing us all through the patriarch's good sense, he allows him first of all to give evidence of the godfearing character of his own attitude on each occasion, and then confers the recompense on his part, so that we too may show zeal in imitating the patriarch by committing ourselves to efforts of virtue and thus putting ourselves in the way of its rewards.

(8) Now, however, it is time to propose for your consideration the contents of today's reading. In fact, it hardly requires commentary—the very reading of the text suffices to reveal the extraordinary degree of the good man's virtue. "Now, it happened," the text reads, "that in the reign of Amarphath king of Sennaar, Arioch king of Alasar, Chodologomor king of Elam, and Tharthak king of nations made war with Balak king of Sodom, Barsak king of Gomorrah, Sennaar king Adamah, Sumobor king of Seboim, and the king of Balak (that is, Segor). All the latter joined forces in the salt valley (that is, the Salt Sea)."⁸ Note the precision of Scripture in recording the names of the kings and their peoples—not without purpose but for you to learn from their names their barbaric character. These men, it says, remember, made war on the king of Sodom and the others. Then it also teaches us the cause of the war, what gave rise to it. "For twelve years," the text says, remember, "they had been in thrall to Chodologomor king of Elam, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled. In the fourteenth year, however, came Chodologomor and those kings supporting him and they slew

8. Gen 14.1–3.

the giants in Astaroth and Karnaim, the powerful nations along with them, the Ommaioi in the city of Shaveh, the Horites in the mountains of Seir as far as the terebinth of Pharan, which is in the wilderness. They reversed direction and came to the spring of judgment, which is [325] now Kadesh, and slew all the rulers of Amalek and the Amorites dwelling in Hazazontamar."⁹

(9) Let us not idly pass these words by, dearly beloved, nor consider the account to be of no value. It was of set purpose that Sacred Scripture recounted everything to us with precision so that we should learn the might of these barbarians and the degree of valor they displayed and with how much ferocity they involved themselves in war so as to clash even with the giants—that is, men powerful in bodily stature—and put to flight all the peoples dwelling there. You see, just as a swollen torrent sweeps away everything in its path and destroys it, in just the same way the barbarians fell on these peoples and destroyed them completely with the result that they put to flight the rulers of the Amalekites and all the others. But perhaps someone may say, What good is it for me to know about the might of the barbarians? It was not idly or to no purpose that Scripture mixed these matters in with its account, nor is it without point that we are now bringing it to your attention and directing you in turn to recall their valor; rather, our purpose is that from the ensuing instruction you may learn both the extraordinary degree of God's power and also the patriarch's virtue.

(10) So, against these forces that had gained such power and had routed so many peoples, "There went out to do battle the kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, Adamah, Seboim and Balak (that is, Segor); they took up battle positions in the Salt Valley against Chodologomor, Tharthak, Amarphath and Arioch—four kings against five. Now, the valley is salty, pits of bitumen."¹⁰ Then, for us to learn how they were terror-

9. Gen 14.4–7. Chrysostom's habitual reminder of the precision of Scripture in these verses is made with tongue in cheek, his obvious lack of interest in historical geography and legendary characters appearing in the unusual rapidity of commentary.

10. Gen 14.8–10.

stricken at their boldness and the might of their power and were sent fleeing, Scripture says, "The kings of Sodom and Gomorrah took to flight and chanced upon the place of the bitumen pits, while the remainder took to the hill country." Do you see how great was the might of these men? How they managed to terrify their enemies just by their very sight and caused them to be sent fleeing? Now see how with complete ease they put to flight all their foes, took all their possessions and departed. "Now, they seized the hill country, all the horses of the men of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their provisions, and departed. Now, they also seized Lot, Abram's nephew, and his accoutrements, and made off. He had, you see, been living in Sodom."¹¹

(11) Notice that what I said yesterday has come to be true, that Lot, far from being better off for his choice of the better parts, rather had learned from experience not to set his heart on the better parts. You see, not only did no benefit come to him from it but, lo, he was even led away into captivity and learnt the lesson through experience that it was much better for him to enjoy the just man's company than to be parted from him and undergo these great trials even if living independently. I mean, he parted from the patriarch and thought he enjoyed greater independence, had the good fortune to enjoy the better parts and experience great prosperity—and all of a sudden he becomes a captive, dispossessed, without hearth or home. The purpose was for you to learn what a great evil division is, and what a great good harmony is, and that we ought not hanker after pride of place but love to take second place instead. "Now, they seized Lot and his accoutrements," the text says, remember. How much better was it to be in the company of the patriarch and accept everything [326] for the sake of not sundering the mutual harmony than be separated and while choosing the better parts be immediately beset with such awful perils and fall into the clutches of barbarians?

11. Gen 14.11–12, with an apparently inadvertent insertion of the hill country into the list of booty, under the influence of the previous verse—to judge from comparison with the Hebrew and LXX.

(12) "One of those who escaped came and told Abraham the traveler. Now, he was camped near the oak of Mambre the Omorite, brother of Eschol and Aunan, who were confederates of Abram."¹² How was it that the patriarch had no knowledge that such forces of war were on the rampage? Perhaps he chanced to be at a great distance from the conflict, and for that reason knew nothing of it. "Now, someone came and told Abraham the traveler," the text says, to remind us that he got the news on his return from Chaldea. You see, because he had his camp across the Euphrates, consequently he was described also as traveler. Right from the outset his parents gave him this name, suggesting to him ahead of time his movement from there; in other words, he was also called Abram because he would one day cross the Euphrates and enter Palestine.¹³ Notice how his parents, all unaware, and unbelievers to boot, gave the child the name under the influence of God's inventive wisdom, as was also the case with Lamech giving Noe his name. This, after all, is a characteristic of God's loving kindness, oftentimes to foretell even through unbelievers events due to happen a long time later. So, the text says, someone came and told the traveler what had happened, the capture of his nephew, the great power of those kings, the sack of Sodom and the shameful flight. "Now, he was camped near the oak of Mambre the Omorite, brother of Eschol and Aunan, who were confederates of Abram." Perhaps at this point, however, someone might wonder, Why was it that the just man Lot, alone of the fugitives from Sodom, was taken into captivity? Far from occurring idly or to no purpose, this was for Lot to learn through the events themselves the patriarch's virtue, and that others might also be saved, and that he might learn not to hanker after pride of place but yield to his betters.

12. Gen 14.13.

13. Chrysostom is thus taking issue, like his editor De Montfaucon and modern commentators after him, with a significant textual obscurity—the meaning of the word we have rendered "traveler" for *perates* in his LXX text, translating a Hebrew form based on the consonants *hbr*, which some would read as "Hebrew" and thus detect another sign that the strange ch. 14 came from a non-Israelite source. Cf. Speiser, *Genesis* 102–109.

(13) Now, let us at this point hear the sequel so as to learn both the just man's virtue and God's assistance beyond all telling. Give careful heed, however, to what is said, and strain your attention to the utmost. Great, you see, are the benefits to be derived from this, especially to learn the lesson in this case from what happened to Lot that we need never be at a loss if, on the one hand, good people encounter trials while, on the other, scoundrels and rascals escape them, nor should we in any way hanker after pride of place nor regard anything preferable to association with good people; instead, even if it means servitude, we should consider association with men of virtue to be more desirable than being at liberty. Along with these lessons, however, we can also learn from this incident the patriarch's great tolerance, the extraordinary degree of his affection, the greatness of his bravery, his scorn for wealth, the unspeakable power of God's assistance to him. The text reads, "When Abram heard that his nephew Lot had been captured, he called up the retainers of his own household to the number of three hundred and eighteen and gave chase as far as Dan, falling upon them by night, himself and his retainers, and he continued to strike them as far as Chobal, which is west of Damascus. He recovered all the cavalry of the Sodomites, and rescued his nephew Lot, all his accoutrements, his people and his women."¹⁴

(14) Consider in this case, I ask you, dearly beloved, [327] the greatness of heart exemplified in the just man's virtue: trusting in the power of God he was not cowed by the force of the enemy when he learnt of the rout they had caused, firstly by falling upon all the tribes and prevailing against the Amalekites and all the others, and then by engaging the Sodomites, putting them to flight and seizing all their property. The reason, you see, why Sacred Scripture described all this to us ahead of time, as well as all they achieved through their bravery, was that you might learn that the patriarch prevailed against them, not by physical strength, but through faith in God, and achieved all this under the protection of help from

14. Gen 14.14-16, differing in details from the Hebrew.

on high, not by wielding weapons and arrows and spears or by drawing bows or raising shields, but with retainers of his own household.

(15) Why was it, someone may ask, that he called up retainers of his own household to the number of three hundred and eighteen? For you to learn that he did not simply take everyone but only retainers of his own household, men raised by Lot, so that they might wreak their vengeance with much relish, like men entering this conflict for their own lord. "He fell upon them by night," the text says, "himself and his retainers, and continued to strike and pursue them." It was, you see, a hand from on high that joined in the attack and assisted in directing the battle—hence they had no need of weapons or fighting machines; instead, he had only to heave into sight with his retainers to smite some and cause others to take to flight, doing both in complete security without harassment from anyone, and he recovered the cavalry of the king of Sodom, his nephew Lot, all his accoutrements and the women. Do you see why it was permitted that while the others fled Lot alone should be taken captive? For two reasons: so that the patriarch's virtue should become manifest, and that on his account many others also might find salvation. Then he returns bearing a great prize of distinction, Lot, and parading as well as him the cavalry, women and accoutrements, announcing in a clear voice and proclaiming more loudly than any trumpet that it was not by human power nor by force of numbers that he had won the prize and achieved victory but had done everything with aid from on high. Do you see in every event the just man being conspicuous and demonstrating to everyone on every occasion God's providence in his regard? Now you see him also zealous to prove a teacher of reverence for God to the Sodomites: "The king of Sodom," Scripture says, remember, "came out to meet him on his return from the slaughter of Chodologomor and the kings with him."¹⁵ Notice the extent of his virtue and his enjoyment of assistance from God; the king comes out to meet

15. Gen 14.17, omitting the place reference in 17b.

this stranger, advanced in years, and shows high regard for him. He had learnt, you see, that the advantage of kingship is as nothing to the person bereft of assistance from on high, and that nothing could be more efficacious than God's hand raised to assist.

(16) The text goes on, "Melchisedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine. Now, he was a priest of God the most high."¹⁶ What is conveyed to us by this comment, "king of Salem" and "priest of God the most high"? He was, for one thing, king of Salem, the text says; blessed Paul, after all, said the same in drawing attention to him when writing to the believers amongst the Hebrews, calling to mind both his name and his city of origin, and at the same time he plumbed the significance of his name [328] and employed some degree of etymology in saying, "Melchisedek, king of righteousness."¹⁷ You see, in the Hebrew language the word *Melchi* means kingdom and *Sedek* righteousness; then, moving on to the name of the city he says, king of peace, Salem after all meaning peace.¹⁸ On the other hand, he was a priest, possibly self-appointed, this being the way with the priests of the time, you see; so in fact he had either been accorded the honor by his peers on account of his preeminence in age, or he had made it his business to act as a priest, like Noe, like Abel, like Abraham when they used to offer sacrifices. In a particular manner he was to prove a type of Christ.¹⁹ Hence Paul too understands him in this role in the words, "With no father, with no mother, with no family history, lacking beginning of days and end of life, he yet resembles the Son of God and remains a priest forever."²⁰ How, you ask, is it possible for a

16. Gen 14.18.

17. Heb 7.2.

18. The imperfect accuracy of these derivations suggests what we already know of Chrysostom's acquaintance with Hebrew, namely, that he had not been introduced to it by his teacher Diodore, and so was at the mercy of rough equivalents. See Introduction (3) and (15), in FOTC 74.

19. A rare venture into typology by Chrysostom, the Antiochene, and only with the encouragement of Scripture itself. His school would discourage him from exploring other Scriptural senses than the literal in the manner of the great Cappadocians, and his commentary on the Psalms finds him embarrassed at times by these restraints. See my *Inspiration*, pp. 128–149.

20. Heb 7.3.

person to have no father or mother, and to lack beginning of days and end of life? You heard that he was a type; well, neither marvel at this, nor expect everything to be found in the type. You see, he would not be a type if he were likely to contain every feature that occurs in reality. So what does the saying mean? It means that, just as the former is said to have no father or mother on account of there being no mention of his parents, and to have no family history on account of there being no history for him, so too Christ, on account of his having no mother in heaven nor father on earth, is said to have no family history and in fact has none.

(17) See how, in the respect he showed the patriarch, a mystery is suggested to us: he brought out bread and wine. Now that you see the type, consider the truth, I ask you, and marvel at the force of Sacred Scripture in foretelling from the very outset things yet to happen. "He blessed Abraham," the text goes on, "in the words, 'Blessed be Abraham by God the most high, who created heaven and earth. Blessed be God the most high, who delivered your enemies into your hands.'"²¹ He not only blessed him but also praised God; in the words, "'Blessed be Abraham by God the most high, who created heaven and earth,'" he also highlighted to us God's power from his creatures. If he in fact is God, creator of heaven and earth, those worshipped by human beings would not be gods; Scripture says, remember, "Let those gods perish who did not make heaven and earth."²² The text reads, "'Blessed be God, who delivered your enemies into your hands.'" Notice, I ask you, how he not only celebrates the just man but also acknowledges God's assistance. After all, without grace from above he could not have prevailed over such might of those besetting him. "'Who delivered your enemies,'" the text says: he it is who caused everything, he it is who rendered the strong powerless, he it is who brought down the armed hordes

21. Gen 14.19–20. Chrysostom's text, though not the LXX generally, seems to slip into the fuller name Abraham at this point, at least for a while—though, predictably, Chrysostom will make great play of the formal name change when it occurs at Gen 17.5 in Homily 39.

22. Jer 10.11.

through those unarmed—from that source is the grace forthcoming that provides you with such power. “‘Who delivered your enemies into your hands,’” the text says.

(18) Do you see how it shows his peaceableness and his love for Lot in indicating that even Abraham regarded his peers as enemies for what they had done to his nephew. “He gave him a tenth of everything,”²³ the text adds. Paul says this, too: “Now, consider how great this man is, to whom the patriarch Abraham even gave a tenth of the spoils”;²⁴ that is to say, from the spoils which he had acquired he rewarded Melchisedek, apportioning him a tenth of everything he had taken, thus already at that stage proving for everyone a teacher of the need to demonstrate great generosity and offer up the first fruits [329] of what has been provided us by God. Then the king of Sodom, struck by the patriarch’s magnanimity, said to him: “‘Return me my men, but keep the equipment for yourself.’”²⁵ A fine gesture of gratitude on the king’s part—but notice the just man’s sound thinking: “Abram, however, said to the king of Sodom, ‘I will raise my hand to swear before God the most high, who made heaven and earth, not to take even string or shoelace of all your goods, in case you were to say, I gave Abram his wealth.’”²⁶ The patriarch’s contempt for material wealth was intense. Why is it with an oath that he rejects the offer in the words, “‘I will raise my hand to swear before God the most high, who created heaven and earth’”?²⁷ He wants to give the king of Sodom two lessons, that he is above the gifts offered by him and gives evidence of great wisdom; he is anxious to prove an instructor for him in reverence, as if to teach him in these

23. Gen 14.20b.

24. Heb 7.4.

25. Gen 14.21.

26. Gen 14.22–23. The future tense of the oath makes little sense, and again (cf. Homily 15, n. 8 above) arises from LXX misreading of Hebrew verb forms.

27. Again Chrysostom quotes the verse in a slightly different form from before, raising the question: is this the mark of a preacher whose recall is not always word-perfect (cf. Introduction (15), in FOTC 74), and is it irreconcilable with the view that the homilies represent a text prepared for delivery but not actually preached in their present form?

words, I am calling him to witness that I will take nothing of yours—namely, the Creator of all—so that you may come to know the God over all and not regard as gods the things shaped by human hands. This, in fact, is the maker of heaven and earth, he also determined the course of this war and was the cause of victory. So don't expect me to be ready to take anything you've offered me. It was not, you see, for a reward that I wreaked vengeance; instead, in the first instance it was out of love for my nephew, and then from the very nature of a good man that I should wrest from the clutches of barbarians people wrongfully abducted.

(19) "I will not take even string or shoelace of all your goods"—that is to say, not even a chance item, nothing worthless or anything thought beneath contempt. I mean, people are accustomed to call a shoelace the tip of the shoe because it comes to a point; in fact, barbarians normally use this kind. Then he states the reason for his refusal, "'In case you were to say, I gave Abram his wealth.'" I have on my side the supplier of countless goods, I enjoy much favor from on high, I have no need of wealth from you, I don't want human resources, I am content with the regard God pays me, I know the generosity of his gifts towards me. Having yielded to Lot worthless scraps, I have been granted great promises beyond telling, and now by not accepting wealth from you I earn for myself greater wealth and win further grace from him. This in my opinion, at any rate, was the reason why he took the oath in the words, "'I will raise my hand to swear before God the most high,'" namely, that the king should not think that he was simply putting up a pretence about what was likely to happen, but should rather be quite clear about his not taking the least bauble from him. He was honoring that command given by Christ to the disciples, "Freely you have received, freely give."²⁸ In other words, he is saying, Surely I have contributed nothing to the course of the war other than consent and encouragement, whereas the victory and the spoils and everything else has been his work in his invisible might.

²⁸ Matt 10.8.

(20) Then, in case the king should think that it was out of scorn or contempt that he did not accept what was offered by him, and to show even in this the mildness and good sense of his thinking, he said, I will take nothing “except what my young men consumed and the portion for the men who accompanied me, Eschol, Aunan and Mambre—they will take a portion.”²⁹ These I will allow to take a portion, he says, since they have given evidence of deep friendship. [330] “These,” you see, the text says,³⁰ “were Abram’s confederates,” that is, joined in friendship; this shows their option to share the perils with him. Hence, with the intention of rewarding them, he is even prepared to take some portion, and in this once again he fulfills the apostolic law in the words, “The worker deserves his fare.”³¹ I mean, he lets them take no more than their due: “except what my young men consumed and the portion for the men who accompanied me, Eschol, Aunan and Mambre—they will take a portion.” Do you see the precision of the patriarch’s virtue both in giving evidence as well of good sense in the matter of his disregard and scorn for wealth, and at the same time in doing everything so as not to appear to have acted from pretence or contempt and thus to have entertained grandiose notions about winning the victory?

(21) Well, let us in turn imitate this, I beseech you, and take pains to keep ourselves free of the temptation either to bask in a desperate glory on the pretext of virtue or to neglect virtue on the pretext of humility. Instead, let us in all cases keep to the middle course and base the good works done by us on humility as a kind of foundation and basis so that our practice of virtue may be established securely. This, after all, is real virtue when it has humility associated with it. I mean, the person who has laid down this foundation securely will be able to construct his edifice to whatever height he wishes. This is the greatest security, this an impregnable fortification,

29. Gen 14.24.

30. Chrysostom’s perhaps—unless De Montfaucon is misreading the MSS—but not the Hebrew or the LXX otherwise.

31. Matt 10.10.

this an unassailable tower, this supports every structure, not allowing it to be toppled by force of winds nor by onset of hurricanes nor by assault from gales; instead, it renders it safe against every attack and equips it as if with steel. In this way humility preserves virtue from defeat and wins for us great reward from the generosity of the loving God. This was the way the patriarch received such an extent of God's wonderful promises. I mean, you will be aware from what follows in the text due to be read later how, with God's permission, even in this case he scorned the gifts made to him by the king of Sodom and thus was accorded wonderfully ineffable gifts of God. For this virtue he was not alone in being conspicuous, but along with him all other good people. To the extent that you are industrious in reading the holy Scriptures you will be able to discover this happening in every case. You see, whenever our loving Lord sees us scorning the things of this present life, he provides us generously with these as well, and also stores up for us the enjoyment of future goods. This you can observe happening also in the case of wealth, the glory of this present life and all perishable things.

(22) Accordingly, let us despise this world's wealth so as to be able to find the true wealth, let us scorn the empty glory of this life so as to enjoy that other genuine, dependable kind; let us mock this world's prosperity so as to attain to those other ineffable blessings; let us consider present realities of no value so as to be able to direct all our energies towards the desire for what lies ahead. You see, it is not possible for the person attached to present realities ever to entertain the desire for those other ineffable blessings; as though some film lies over his body's eyes, [331] so the longing for this world dulls his intellect and does not allow him to see at a glance anything that is to his advantage. Nor, on the other hand, could the person who has the desire for those other sure and dependable blessings set his heart on those perishable, decaying things that are whisked away even before they have taken form. I mean, the person consumed with longing for God and possessed of desire for what lies ahead sees the situation of this world with different eyes, and knows that this present

life is all sham and deception and is no different from dreams. Hence blessed Paul too said as much in his letter, "The form of this world is passing away,"³² to show us that every human thing only exists in appearance and passes away like a shadow or dream, having about it nothing true, nothing firm. So how could it be other than an infantile attitude to go after shadows and give importance to dreams, and cling to these things that shortly afterwards pass away? "The form of this world is passing away," he says, remember. When you hear it is "passing away," why do you still go after it any longer? When you hear that all human things only exist in appearance and are in fact destitute of true meaning, why do you willingly submit to a deception, and not rather consider their transient and insubstantial condition and bypass them, while transferring your desire to those other realities that are everlasting, fixed and dependable, susceptible of no change? You see, if you are to understand the point of view of the world's teacher, observe him further in another place intending to demonstrate the worthlessness of all the glitter of this world by the kind of language he employs when he says, "Visible things," even if you cite abundance of wealth, glory, reputation, power and influence, even kingship itself and wearing a crown and a lofty throne—all these "visible things are transient,"³³ giving evidence of a short time's duration, not affording us enjoyment for long. So what do you want us to seek after if all these visible things are in fact transient? Those others that are not visible, he says, not these visible ones but those that are not seen by these bodily eyes of ours. And who would offer us this advice, you ask, to bypass visible things and seek after those that are not seen? Let the very nature of things, he says, instruct you that while the former, even if in fact visible, nevertheless rapidly pass away, the latter, even if in fact we cannot now see them, nevertheless are in reality everlasting, have an eternal duration, know no conclusion, suffer no ending, experience no change, remain solid and immovable. Perhaps I may even seem to be a nuisance

32. 1 Cor 7.31.

33. 2 Cor 4.18.

offering this advice day in day out to no purpose—but what am I to do? Great is the harm wrought by wickedness, great the tyranny of possessions, great the dearth of virtue. Hence I am anxious to get the better of the disease if only by dint of frequency of exhortation and lead those attending here to complete recovery. You see, the reason that we take pains to engage in the explanation of the Scriptures, bring to your notice the virtues of the just, and never leave off echoing the same message is that we may be able through all these means to urge you on to imitation of these good people.

(23) At this late stage, at any rate, let us show some care for our own salvation and take proper advantage of the opportunity given us in light of the appointed day in our life; while there is yet time, let us make every effort in the direction of repentance and correction of our faults, let us use the abundance of our wealth for the betterment of our souls and spend the surplus on those in need. After all, why is it, tell me, that you allow your silver and gold to be consumed [332] by rust, whereas it ought to be emptied into the bellies of the poor so that by lodging it in that safe deposit at the appropriate time you may enjoy assistance from it when you particularly need comfort from it, and that those who are nourished on it at your hands may on that dread day open the doors of confidence to you and welcome you into their eternal dwellings?³⁴ Let us, on the contrary, not allow our garments to be consumed by moths and rot away to no purpose in the cupboard while so many people are needy and go about naked; let us instead put the naked Christ ahead of moths and clothe him as he goes about naked for us and our salvation, so that having been deemed worthy to clothe him we may hear on that dread day, “I was naked and you clothed me.”³⁵ His precepts aren’t burdensome, are they? They are not excessive, are they? What is rotting away, he says, what is being consumed by moths, what is used up idly and to no purpose—this take pains to dispose of profitably, so that you may both escape the harm of the loss and also store up for your-

34. Cf. Luke 16.9.

35. Matt 25.36.

self the greatest advantage from them. It is, after all, a mark of excessive inhumanity after so much enjoyment to store up the surplus in chests and cupboards and not succeed in alleviating the neediness of our fellows but rather choose to have it destroyed by rust and moths and fall into the hands of robbers, and thus earn condemnation on this account rather than win a reward on their account by disposing of it properly. Let us not, indeed, I beseech you, deal so negligently with the salvation of our souls, but instead dispose of our surplus to those in need and so lay up for ourselves great confidence so that we may be found worthy to enjoy ineffable blessings, thanks to the grace and loving kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, power and honor, now and forever, for ages of ages. Amen.

HOMILY 36

*"Now, after these events Abram received an oracle from the Lord in a vision by night, with these words, 'Don't be afraid, Abram, I am your shield. Your reward will be exceedingly great.'"*¹



HE [332] VIRTUE OF THE JUST resembles a treasure that contains great wealth beyond all telling. Just as any person who managed to take from that treasure even a slight part would gain for himself considerable prosperity, exactly the same you will find happening also in the case of the patriarch. Notice, in fact, how almost every day we propose to you some instruction from the narrative about him, providing you with sustenance in generous measure without ever being able to deal adequately with the slightest part of his good deeds even today—such is the abundance of his virtue. It is like the waters flowing generously from a spring: even if people draw from them all, the waters emerging from the spring not only suffer no diminution, but the greater number of people drawing water so much the greater force does the water have in issuing forth. Well, exactly the same thing do we see happening in the case of this wonderful patriarch: despite the great numbers of people drawing from the spring of his good deeds from the time he lived up to the present, not only have they not exhausted the waters but the wealth of his good deeds abounds even further. In fact, we will find commentary on him occurring in the pages of Sacred Scripture stitched together like some golden thread:² on

1. Gen 15.1, with the addition of the words "by night," perhaps by Chrysostom himself, since the words are not in Hebrew or the LXX generally, and yet Chrysostom makes some play on them.

2. This homily, like many others, eases the congregation into the subject matter through a series of figures to do with the rich fare being offered in a scriptural homily, as we noted in Introduction (12) in FOTC 74. This homily protracts the series more than most.

each occasion he is first observed giving evidence of his characteristic good sense, while immediately there follows reward from God.

(2) For you to learn that this is the case, we need to summarize for you his story from the beginning, [333] so that you may see both the extraordinary degree of the just man's faith shown in regard to God's promises and rewards provided generously by the loving God. In fact, this just man is capable of instructing us all to embrace with enthusiasm the struggles of virtue in our trust in rewards from above, to realize the generosity of our Lord and to accept with ease all the things considered difficult in this world's terms, nourished as we are by the hope of recompense. Pay close attention, I beseech you, how from the outset he brought to bear his own innate resources arising from the knowledge inherent in our nature and had no teacher from any external source; rather, he was raised by infidel parents and yet enjoyed the divine vision. You see, since, far from following in the erroneous footsteps of his father, from his earliest years he gave evidence instead of devotion to divine things, he soon had the good fortune to enjoy attention from above while still in Chaldaea. This, remember, was what blessed Stephen explained clearly to us in these words, "The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was in Mesopotamia before settling in Charran."³ Do you see how the vision induced him to move from there? After all, it was to be expected that with his devotion to divine things he would have shown respect for his parents and won his father over to a loving frame of mind, and thus become the cause of his moving from there: on account of the son's love the father would have consented to abandon his own country and dwell in a foreign one. Consider, precisely, however, I ask you, how the attention given him by God on account of his anticipated virtue once more causes his virtue to be more patent: he chose to leave the paternal country and dwell in a foreign one so as to put into effect the command from God. In my opinion he was ready

3. Acts 7.2.

even without his relatives to make the move by himself; but, as I said before, the man's virtues and his great devotion to his parents brought it about that his father became a so-journer with him.

(3) Then, when he reached Charran, he pitched his tent there. At the death of Tharra—that was his father's name, remember—he is once more bidden by God to move from there. "Go forth from your country," the text says, remember, "and your kindred, onwards to the land that I will show you."⁴ You see, since he had moved to Charran with his whole household, for that reason in giving him the command in this case to leave he added, "from your country and your kindred," to show him that he wanted him to make the move by himself, alone, and not to drag his brother—I mean Nachor—or anybody else along with him. Now, he said "from your own country" since they had dwelt there no little time and by then had made their home in it as if in their own native land. Though admittedly his grief for his parents was still at its height, and there were many difficulties and obstacles involved in moving at that time, nevertheless he responded with great alacrity to the command from the Lord without knowing where an end would come to his journeying. "Onward," the text says, remember, not to this land or that, but to "the one I will show you." Despite the direction being so vague, he carried out the command without being concerned about it in any way; he did, however, take his nephew [334] with him, showing in this his characteristic virtue. I mean, since he had taken him into his company as a young man and gradually made him an imitator of his own virtue, he would not bear to leave him behind and instead took him as a companion on his journey. In other words he said to himself, If my father, infidel though he was, agreed through love of me to leave his ancestral home, where we were born and raised, and accompany me, and ended his life in a foreign land, surely much more unwilling would I be to allow

4. Gen 12.1. Having already spent 35 homilies on 14 chapters of Genesis and dealt with this incident adequately in Homily 31, Chrysostom can still halt further progress to return to it—doubtless for its moral value.

my brother's son, who from his earliest years has shown that he is gradually advancing in virtue, to be left here.

(4) Since he had shown his godliness in every way and had even made this transfer, accordingly when he reached Palestine and crossed the frontier of the Canaanites God appeared to him out of a wish to strengthen his resolve and offer him his hand. He said to him, "'I will give this land to your descendants.'"⁵ What he really longed for—I mean posterity—this he immediately promises him, granting him recompense for such great labors. You see, though he had been deprived of natural progeny, and age by then had obliged him to give up hope of any, by his promise God restores his vigor and transforms him into a person of greater enthusiasm, making a new man of him and preparing him for the struggles ahead. Accordingly, notice the just man after this promise engaging in another contest: with the onset of famine and the presence of extreme hardship in Canaan he made tracks for Egypt, and in his desire to find relief from famine he involved himself in greater perils. Sarah's womanly beauty and charm almost brought him face to face with death. Hence when he was on the point of entering Egypt, he said to her, "'I know that you are very beautiful.'"⁶ I recognize the bloom of your charm, and I am afraid of the Egyptians' lust. So if they see you and know that I have you always with me as my wife, perhaps they will spare your life so as to put into effect their passionate frenzy, whereas they will kill me so as to be able to perpetuate their crime without fear in the absence of anyone capable of bringing their turpitude to light. "'So say that I am your brother.'"⁷ See his spirit of steel, see his attitude firmer than iron; the dreaded outcome did not sway his thinking, nor did he think or say to himself, Is this the reason I left my own country and as index of my great obedience I went to another one, to fall victim to these scoundrels? Didn't he promise me just recently, "'I will give this land to your descendants'"? Lo, he strikes our soul with fear of dishonor and death. On the contrary, Abram allowed nothing of the

5. Gen 12.7.

6. Gen 12.11.

sort to affect his thinking; instead, his one concern was how to act in this evil scenario so as to succeed in escaping at least one of these two perils besetting him.

(5) He had brought all his resources to bear in making his plans with courage; his wife had acted with every sign of obedience and devotion to her husband and had put into effect his decisions. So when they completed what lay within their power, when things offered no hope by human reasoning and the criminal events had almost come to pass, then it was that the great providence of God in their regard was revealed. That is to say, not only did God snatch the woman from outrage in his anger vented on the king and all his household, but he also caused the patriarch to return with much acclaim from Egypt to Palestine. [335] Consider how in the midst of these trials the loving Lord made available his grace and caused him to be at the peak of his condition for facing the contests still ahead, not permitting him to be bereft of his assistance but arranging by every means to make perfectly clear to him that, trifling though his contribution might be, he was being accorded wonderfully abundant resources even surpassing human nature.

(6) So do you see the good man's endurance? Observe likewise after his return from there the extent of his humility and his great restraint. I mean, when he returned from Egypt after acquiring great affluence (not himself solely, however, but accompanied by his nephew), "the countryside could not manage to support their living together," (the text says) "since their company was numerous"⁷—whence even trouble broke out between the herdsmen of Lot and Abram. This just man, however, showed his mildness of spirit and the extraordinary degree of his good sense by calling Lot and saying to him, "'Let there be no trouble between you and me, nor between my herdsmen and yours, for we are brothers'"⁸—as if to say to him, Nothing is so important as peace, nothing is more serious than strife; so to rid ourselves of every ground of contention, choose whatever territory you wish and leave

7. Gen 13.6.

8. Gen 13.8.

me the remainder for the sake of our remaining free from all rivalry and dispute. Do you see the man's virtue? He allowed his junior the choice of the best parts, and was content with the poorest land. See him, however, in another situation, enjoying great reward after giving evidence of effort on his part: as soon as the separation took place, God said to him after Lot's parting from him: "'Lift up your eyes and see all the land on either side: all the land you see I will give to you and your descendants forever.'"⁹ Notice how much regard he was accorded for the humility he had displayed in regard to his nephew; whereas he made slight concessions and yet was granted far greater rewards, Lot on the contrary shortly afterwards fell into perils after taking pride of place, not only gaining no advantage from his choice but also suddenly falling captive and losing hearth and home, learning through the very turn of events the just man's exceeding virtue and gaining the lesson himself never to perpetuate anything like that in future. You recall that after Lot took up residence in Sodom, immediately a bitter war broke out: the kings of the neighboring peoples attacked with great force and completely devastated the whole country, slaying the giants, driving out the Amalekites, even forcing the king of Sodom and Gomorrah to take flight, occupying the whole mountain region, overwhelming the cavalry of the king of Sodom, capturing Lot with his women and all his possessions, and thus taking their leave.

(7) Notice, however, God's wonderful providence: out of a wish to free Lot from captivity and at the same time to shed notoriety on the patriarch, he prompts the just man to come to the assistance of his nephew. Learning of the event, he fell on those kings with his retainers, routed them with complete ease, and recovered Lot, his women and all the king's horses, taking splendid spoils and making quite clear to everyone God's favor in his regard and the fact that he inflicted such a great defeat not by his own power but under the protection

9. Gen 13.14-15, in a somewhat paraphrased form of those verses already commented on by Chrysostom in Homily 34.

of help from on high. Then he took pains by this turn of events to become an [336] instructor in religion to all the residents of Sodom through his converse with the king. The king met him, expressed his thanks for what he had done and said he would let him keep all the horses while retaining the people for himself. Notice in turn the just man's magnanimity in the lesson he gives of his own sound values, namely, that he is protected against gifts from the king, and in leading the king to the knowledge of religion. You see, he did not simply tell him, I decline to accept anything from you, or I don't need any reward. Instead, what? "I will raise my hand to swear before God the most high,"¹⁰ (as if teaching him that those worshipped by you are not gods, but figures of stone and wood; one alone is God over all) "who made heaven and earth, that I will not accept from you even string or shoelace,"¹¹ lest you think we have taken vengeance for their sake and be in a position to say you were responsible for my prosperity. In fact, the one who provides the victory and guarantees my triumph is he who supplies also the source of my wealth. Notice how, if only he had wanted to, the king could have gained a lot from the patriarch's virtue in everything. In case he might think that it was through stupidity or arrogance that he spurned what he had offered, consequently he said to him, While I will accept nothing—after all, I don't need it, and I don't depend on others to add to my wealth—yet I will allow my associates in danger to take portions lest they seem to have cold comfort for their good offices.

(8) While this was the reply the good man made to the king of Sodom, on the contrary, when Melchisedek king of Salem in his turn offered him bread and wine ("He was," the text says, remember, "priest of God the most high"¹²), he accepted the offerings from him and rewarded him for the blessing bestowed on him and the praise of God (he said, remember, as the text tells us, "Blessed be Abram by God the most high, and blessed be God, who delivered your enemies into your

10. Gen 14.22.

11. Gen 14.22-23, again paraphrased.

12. Gen 14.18.

hands'”¹³) by giving him a tenth of all the spoils he had taken. Do you see the just man's godfearing attitude shown in every circumstance and how, while declining to take from the king of Sodom even string or shoelace, he did, on the other hand, accept the offering of Melchisedek and even recompensed him for them with offerings of his own, giving us the lesson of exhibiting great discretion instead of simply and without question accepting gifts from everyone. You see, whereas the king of Sodom proved well-disposed in giving gifts, yet he was in fact faithless in other matters and stood in need of much instruction; hence, on the one hand, Abram spurned the gifts, and on the other he went to considerable trouble to encourage him to a sense of religion both through the gifts he declined to accept and the conversation he had with him. Quite rightly, on the contrary, did he accept them from Melchisedek; after all, Sacred Scripture gave indication of the man's virtue in saying, “Now, he was a priest of God the most high.” In particular, these events were a type [337] of Christ, and the offerings themselves prefigured a kind of mystery¹⁴—hence Abram accepted them and in taking them he also taught us by the recompense given by him the greatness of his own virtue. He gave him a tithe, you remember, indicating by that his godly purpose.

(9) Perhaps our sermon has been drawn out to great length, but not idly or to no purpose.¹⁵ We came to know, in brief, the just man's bravery right from the beginning up to the text proposed to us today, his magnanimity, the extraordinary degree of his faith, his sensible attitude, the extent of his humility, his exceeding scorn for wealth, the constant

13. Gen 14.19–20, also paraphrased.

14. It is rare to find Chrysostom the Antiochene recognizing a spiritual or typological sense in Scripture, and then only (as here) with encouragement from the New Testament. His school's interest in the literal sense did not allow such departures, and his audience did not expect it. See Introduction (21) in FOTC 74.

15. Well might Chrysostom advert to the length of this introduction, which has been little other than a summary of those chapters 12–14 of Genesis he had already commented on in similar vein in recent homilies. Did he suspect that some of his congregation had in fact not attended those homilies and needed a synopsis?

providence of God's favor in his regard, and how the support given him each day rendered the good man in every instance more conspicuous and admirable. If, however, you don't mind and are not weary, let us also touch on the text read just now and draw the sermon to a close by proposing a few matters to you in order that you may learn how much reward he was again granted for scorning the gifts offered him by the king of Sodom. What in fact does it say? "Now, after these events Abram received an oracle from the Lord." Why did it begin, "Now, after these events"? What events, tell me? Is it referring to his actions in regard to the king of Sodom? After that rejection, is it saying, after declining what was offered by him, after the lesson he gave by rejecting the gifts in leading him to a sense of religion and knowledge of the Creator of all—"now, after these events," after providing Melchisedek with the tithe, when (in short) he had discharged all that lay in his power, then "after these events Abram received an oracle from the Lord in a vision by night, with these words: 'Don't be afraid, Abram, I am your shield. Your reward will be exceedingly great.'"

(10) See the loving kindness of the Lord in immediately coming to his support by rewarding him with acts of kindness, anointing his athlete for the contest and bringing new life to him. "He received an oracle from the Lord in a vision by night." Why by night?¹⁶ So that he might receive the oracle in tranquility. God said to him, "'Don't be afraid, Abram.'" Notice the extraordinary degree of his care. Why did he say, Don't be afraid? Since he had scorned so much wealth by giving little importance to the offerings of the king, God said to him, Have no fear for despising gifts of such value, nor be distressed on the score of your diminished prosperity. "'Don't be afraid.'" Then to cheer his spirit further, he adds his name to the encouragement by saying, "'Don't be afraid, Abram.'"

16. As we have remarked, neither the Hebrew nor LXX support Chrysostom in this reading. He is perhaps reasoning from v. 5 that it is night, though v. 12 speaks of the day (as Chrysostom admits in Homily 37)—something that suggests to modern commentators (but not Chrysostom, of course) diversity of tradition.

It proves to be no little help in encouraging a person to invoke the name of the person we are addressing. Then he said, "I am your shield." This phrase is also rich in meaning: I summoned you from the Chaldeans, I led you hither, I rescued you from the perils of Egypt, I promised once and again to give this land to your descendants, I it is who will be your shield; after daily making you acclaimed by all, I will be your shield—that is, I will struggle in your stead, I will be your shield. "Your reward will be [338] exceedingly great." You refused to accept reward for the troubles you suffered in exposing yourself to such risks; instead, you scorned both the king and what he offered you. I will provide you with a reward, not to the degree that you would have received, but wonderfully, exceedingly great: "Your reward," the text says, remember, "will be exceedingly great."

(11) Do you see the Lord's generosity? Do you see the force of his words? Do you see how he encouraged this champion of religion? Do you see how he invigorated his spirit? I mean, the one who knows the unspoken thoughts of our mind understood that the just man could do with comfort from his own words; after all, see what he said in deriving confidence from his words: "Abram said, however, 'Lord, what will you give me? I am to pass on without children.'"¹⁷ Since God had promised him a reward, a wonderfully, exceedingly great reward, Abram revealed his grief of spirit and the disappointment affecting him constantly on account of his childless condition in saying, Lord, what sort of thing will you give me? After all, behold, I have reached the height of old age and am to pass on without children. See how from the outset the just man showed his sound thinking in calling his departure from here passing on. I mean, people who live an assiduous life of virtue really pass on from struggle, as it were, and are freed from their bonds when they transfer from this life. You see, for people living virtuously it is a kind of transfer from a worse situation to a better, from a temporary existence to an everlasting one that is protected from death and has no

17. Gen 15.2.

end. "I am to pass on without children," he said. And to win the merciful Lord over, far from resting content with these words what did he say? "'Since you have given me no offspring, a son of my household slave Mazek will be my heir.'" ¹⁸ These words reveal the extreme degree of the pain in his soul, as if to say to God, Far from being granted what my slave was, I am to pass away without child or heir, whereas my slave will inherit the gifts granted me by you, despite the promise received from you more than once in the words, "To your descendants I will give this land." Consider, I ask you, the just man's virtue in this case also in the fact that while entertaining these thoughts in his mind he did not protest nor say any harsh words; instead, because driven on in this case by the words spoken to him, he spoke boldly to the Lord, revealed the tumult of his interior thoughts and made no secret of the wound to his spirit—hence in turn he received instant healing.

(12) "Immediately," the text goes on, "the voice of God came to him." See the precision of Scripture! "Immediately," the text says. He did not allow the just man to be distressed for a moment, but rather brought immediate comfort and assuaged the severity of the pain through his words to him. "Immediately," the text says, "the voice of God came to him saying, 'Not that child will be your heir, but the one who comes from your body—he will be your heir.'" ¹⁹ Is this what you are afraid of? he asks. Is this what upsets you, does this aggravate your discouragement? Well, learn that "'not that child will be your heir, but the one who comes from your body—he will be your heir.'" So look not to human nature, nor consider your old age, nor Sarah's sterility; instead, trust the power of my promise, leave aside your discouragement, and rather take sufficient heart and convince [339] yourself that you will have an heir that will be born from your own

18. Gen 15.2b-3, a passage that is corrupt in the Hebrew and rendered in a more complicated fashion in the LXX generally; in abbreviating it Chrysostom has probably represented the sense of Abram's complaint of lacking a true heir.

19. Gen 15.4.

body. Then, since the promise was beyond nature and surpassed human reasoning (the natural difficulties, after all, caused considerable tumult within him—his old age, Sarah's sterility and the barrenness of her womb), he magnifies the extent of the promise so that the just man might be able to take heart in considering the generosity of the one making the promise. "He took him outside," the text goes on, "and said to him: 'Look up at the sky and count the number of the stars—if in fact you can number them.' He said, 'That will be the number of your descendants.' Abram had faith in God, and this was reckoned as righteousness in him."²⁰

(13) Why did it inform us that "he took him outside"? Well, since it had said previously that God appeared to him in a vision by night and addressed those words to him, whereas now, however, he wants to show him the innumerable stars in the sky, the text says, "He took him outside and said, 'Look up at the sky and count the number of stars—if in fact you can number them.' He said, 'That will be the number of your descendants.'" Wonderful the promise, marvelous the extent of the pledge—yet if we consider the power of the one promising, nothing will seem extraordinary to us. I mean, the one who formed the body from dust, brought it into being from non-being and created all visible things can also lavish upon us what is beyond the limits of nature.

(14) Do you see the Lord's generosity? After Abram said, remember, "'I am to pass on without children'" as though finding himself at the very gates of death and no longer in a position to do anything about having children, he added those further words by saying, "'The son of my household slave Mazeek will be my heir.'" Hence, out of a desire to lift his spirits and cause his thoughts to be optimistic, he both liberates him from the pressing anxiety and also sets his mind at rights with his promise and the greatness of the gift, and by showing him the multitude of stars and promising that his offspring would be equal to them he led him to sound hope. That is to say, when he saw the Lord's promise and discarded

20. Gen 15:5-6.

every human consideration, having regard neither for himself nor for Sarah's being beset by so many handicaps, but rather surpassing all human problems and realizing that God is capable also of granting favors beyond human limits, he took heart from God's words and entertained no doubts nor had any qualms about what had been said. After all, this is what faith really is, when we trust in the power of the one promising, not on the basis of human plausibility of the promise made. "Faith is," remember, as blessed Paul also says, "the substance of things hoped for, the guarantee of what is not seen,"²¹ and again, "After all, if a person sees something, what need has he also to hope for it?"²² Accordingly, that is faith, when we believe in those things that are not seen and keep our mind fixed on the trustworthiness of the one who has made the promise. This, in fact, is exactly what this just man did, giving evidence of much genuine faith in regard to the promises—hence he is acclaimed also by Sacred Scripture, for it added immediately, "Abram had faith in God, and this was reckoned as righteousness in him." Do you see how even before the outcome of the promises he received a commensurate reward for his very act of faith? It was reckoned as righteousness in him, remember, to have faith in the promise from God and not to delve into the words spoken by God by human reasoning.

(15) Accordingly, let us learn, [340] I beseech you, a lesson for ourselves as well from the patriarch, to believe in the words of God and trust in his promise, and not to apply the yardstick of our own reasoning but give evidence of deep gratitude. This, you see, will succeed in making us also be seen to be righteous and will quickly cause us to attain to the promise made by him. In Abraham's case, however, the promise was made that a complete multitude would develop from his descendants, and the effect of the promise was beyond the limits of nature and human logic—hence also faith in God won righteousness for him. In our case, on the other hand, if we are alert enough to see it, he promised much

21. Heb 11.1 in Chrysostom's text. 22. Rom 8.24.

more and we are able in great measure to transcend human reasoning, provided we believe in the power of the one who promises, in order that we may gain also righteousness from faith and attain to the good things promised. You see, all the things that are the particular object of his promise defy human reasoning and surpass all imagining—such is the extent of the promises. I mean, he did not only promise things in this world, the substance of material things, but also after our departure from here and the corruption of our bodies, when our bodies dissolve into dust and ashes—then it is that he promised to raise them up and transform them in greater glory. Blessed Paul says, remember, “The perishable must be clad in imperishability and the mortal be clad in immortality.”²³ After the resurrection of our bodies he promised to grant us enjoyment of the kingdom, life with the saints, enjoyment for all eternity, and those ineffable good things “which eye has not seen nor ear heard, nor have they been imagined by human heart.”²⁴ Do you see the extraordinary extent of his promise? do you see the greatness of his gifts?

(16) With this in mind and aware of the impossibility of deceit by the one who promises, let us with enthusiasm prepare ourselves for the struggles of virtue so that we may be in a position to enjoy the good things promised and not put present concerns ahead of our salvation and the enjoyment of such wonderful blessings, and instead of considering the effort virtue involves let us have regard for its recompense; when there is need to give money to the poor, let us consider not the expense but the advantage to us stemming from it. You see, the reason that Sacred Scripture compared almsgiving to sowing seed was that we might engage in it with relish and much enthusiasm. After all, if people plough seed into the soil, gather and scatter what they have stored, complete the process with joy and buoyed up with optimistic expectations already sketch in their imagination the sheaves and the brimming barns, much more should those who have been granted the favor of sowing this spiritual seed rejoice and

23. 1 Cor 15:53.

24. 1 Cor 2:9.

exult in the fact that while sowing on earth they are destined to reap in heaven, and while dispensing money they receive remission of sins and find grounds for confidence, procuring for themselves through almsgiving here everlasting repose and life with the saints. If we have a love for self control, let us not have regard for the fact that virtue involves effort, nor that virginity involves a keen struggle; rather, let us consider the end awaiting us, and with this ever in mind let us check evil desire, get the better of the promptings of the flesh and discount the difficulty of effort with [341] the thought of the rewards received in return.

(17) The hope of real gain, after all, is enough to prepare us to face even great risk with boldness, not to mention putting up nobly with the effort virtue involves. I mean, when you consider that after fighting the good fight for a brief period and keeping the lamp of virginity shining you will be accorded that blessed existence and be in a position to join the bridegroom, provided you have your lamps alight and keep enough oil²⁵—that is, the doing of good deeds—how can you fail to survive all those difficulties with ease by keeping in mind that saying of blessed Paul, “Seek after peace with everyone and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord”²⁶ Do you see how he linked peace with holiness? You see, for us to learn that he stipulates not only purity of body but peace as well, he makes timely mention of it out of a wish for us to be secure on both scores and at rest in our thinking, so that there be no alarm or tumult in ourselves but that we live in peace and tranquility, be peaceably disposed to all, mild, gentle and restrained so that all the colors of virtue may blossom on our countenance. In this way, you see, we shall be able for the future to scorn even the glory of this present life by preferring true glory, giving much attention to humility and despising all the prosperity of this present life so as to enjoy true and lasting prosperity and be deemed worthy to see Christ. “Blessed are the pure in heart,” Scripture says, remember, “because they will see God.”²⁷ Accordingly, let us

25. Cf. Matt 25.1-13.

26. Heb 12.14.

27. Matt 5.8.

purify our conscience and conduct our life meticulously so that by passing the present life in all virtue we may be deemed worthy to receive in the world to come the reward of our labors here, thanks to the grace and loving kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, power and honor, now and forever, for ages of ages. Amen.

HOMILY 37

*"The Lord said to Abram: 'I am the God who has brought you out of the land of the Chaldeans to give you this land for your inheritance.' But Abram replied: 'My lord and master, how shall I know that I am to inherit it?'"*¹

WONDERFUL IS [341] THE POWER of Sacred Scripture, and immense the wealth of ideas concealed in its expressions. Hence it behooves us to attend precisely and give ourselves to close study so as to reap the lavish benefits it offers. You see, the reason Christ himself gave this command, "Search the Scriptures,"² was that, far from idly listening to the mere reading, we should rather descend to its very depths and be in a position to grasp the true sense of Scripture. This, after all, is the way with Scripture: in a few words it is often possible to find a great number of ideas. Its teachings, you see, are divine, not human, and consequently you can see it all composed in a manner opposite to human wisdom. What way that is, I will tell you: in the latter case—I mean human wisdom—people's whole interest is concentrated on the sequence of the words, whereas in this case it is completely different. No study of Scripture is about words, their beauty or sequence: it has of itself divine grace resplendent upon it and its sayings have their own beauty. With that other writing you can grasp the sense only after a great amount of unspeakable [342] nit-picking, whereas in this case, as you know, often a short phrase suffices for us to piece out the complete message.

1. Gen 15.7–8. Chrysostom follows the LXX in avoiding reference to Ur as the home of the patriarchs after Haran had earlier been given that designation, though mention of the Chaldeans is still an anachronism.

2. John 5.39.

(2) Consequently, then, yesterday also we proposed the reading to you and picked up the thread of our theme, but since we found such wealth of ideas we weren't able to press ahead further without swamping your recollection with the multitude of ideas and distorting it with the words already spoken.³ Hence I want to pick up that very thread and link together what was said yesterday with what follows so that we may be able to make a complete commentary on the reading and then send you home from here. But pay precise attention, I beseech you, to what is said: if the labor is ours, the gain is yours, or rather it belongs to us both. But why do I say labor? Not at all; instead, it is the gift of God's grace. Accordingly, let us in our turn receive with attention what is granted us by God so that we may gain something for our soul's salvation and thus go off from here. You see, the reason that we lay out for you each day this spiritual table is that by the frequency of the exhortation and by constant attention to the holy Scriptures we may fend off all the evil demon's wiles. After all, when he sees us displaying much zeal for spiritual things, far from attacking us he doesn't even dare to cast a glance in our direction, knowing as he does that he will be making efforts in vain and bringing trouble on his own head.

(3) So, come now, let us pick up the thread of yesterday's remarks and comment on what remains. Well, what was it you were told yesterday? We gave an account of the promise made to Abram, where he directed him to look up at the sky and see the multitude of stars. "'Count the number of the stars,'" he said, remember, "'if in fact you can number them.' He said, 'That will be the number of your descendants.'"⁴ Then, to show us the patriarch's godfearing attitude and the fact that he had faith in God's words through having regard for the one who made the promise and considering the power of the one who gave the guarantee, Sacred Scripture added, "Abram had faith in God, and this was reckoned as righ-

3. As we remarked at that point, Chrysostom spent much of Homily 36 rehearsing the matter of the previous few homilies—and now finds an excuse in the richness of Scripture.

4. Gen 15:5.

teousness in him." Our sermon reached that point yesterday, and we were unable to proceed further; hence it is necessary to propose what follows. "The Lord said to Abram: 'I am the God who has brought you out of the land of the Chaldeans to give you this land for your inheritance.'" See God's considerateness in wanting to strengthen his faith and persuade him to have complete certainty about what had been promised, as if to say, Remember that I took you from your home. Lo, what was said by God about the patriarch proves to be consistent with blessed Stephen's words, that the Lord's directions led to his transfer from his home and from Chaldea itself.⁵ His father, too, responding to his attitude, as we said before, infidel though he was, yet having in his love for Abram a strong basis for attachment, followed him and left that country.

(4) Consequently, on the present occasion God reminds Abram of all the care he had shown him by revealing to him that it was due to his great plans for him and his wish to put into effect his promises in his regard and bring them to fulfillment that he caused him to make such a long journey. "I am the one who has brought you out of the land of the Chaldeans to give you this land for your inheritance.'" It was not idly and in vain that I brought you from that place, was it? The reason [343] that I wanted you to settle in Palestine, to leave your ancestral home and come to this land was that you might inherit it. Accordingly, considering how much care you have enjoyed on my account from the time you left Chaldea up until the present and how famous you have become from day to day as you proved to be more conspicuous for my support and providence in your regard, have confidence also in my words. Do you see the extraordinary degree of his loving kindness? Do you see the extent of his considerateness in wanting to confirm Abram's spirit and make his faith stronger so that he might no longer be inclined to have regard for natural obstacles but rather consider the power of the one who had made the assurances, as if his promises had already taken effect, and thus be free to trust him?

5. Acts 7.2-4.

(5) Once more, however, notice the patriarch, when he had taken comfort in these words, how he looked for greater certitude. "He said," remember, "My lord and master, how shall I know that I am able to inherit it?" Even if Sacred Scripture had previously testified to his having faith in the words of God, for which reason it was reckoned as righteousness in him, nevertheless when he heard that the reason why "I have brought you from the land of Chaldea is to give you this land for your inheritance," he said, While it is not possible for me to have no faith in the words you have spoken, still I would like to know as well the way I would come to inherit it. After all, I see that by now I have reached my old age and to the present time I have been going about like a vagrant, unable to discern the future by human reasoning—even though from the outset (he says) I had faith in your words as being a statement from you, the one able to bring things from non-being to being, to create and transform everything. So it is not out of unbelief that I am asking this; but since you mentioned once again the inheritance, I was wanting to receive as well some more concrete and visible sign, something capable of shoring up the limitations of my thinking. What, then, did the good Lord do? Showing considerateness for his own servant, and out of a wish to fortify his spirit, when he saw him admitting his own limitations and, while believing in the promise, yet wanting some confirmation, he said to him: "Bring me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old goat, a ram, a turtledove and a pigeon."⁶ Observe how he makes a covenant with him in human fashion: just as in the case of human beings, when they make a promise to someone and want to convince the recipient of the promise not to entertain doubts about what is promised, they supply some sign or pledge so that the recipient may have it before his eyes and thus be in a position to know that the promises will take effect in every detail, so too the good Lord, when Abram said, "How shall I know?" replied, Lo, this too I provide you with: "Bring me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old

6. Gen 15.9, involving a slight abbreviation on Chrysostom's part.

goat, a ram, a turtledove and a pigeon.” Notice, I ask you, the degree of detail the good Lord deigns to go into for the sake of the just man’s certitude. Since in ancient times it was the custom to make covenants in this way for people of that time and by that means to endorse them, this was the way the Lord himself followed.

(6) “He brought them,” the text goes on, “and [344] cut them in half.” Observe carefully how it was not idly or to no purpose that it indicated the age as well: he bade him bring three-year-old animals, that is, mature, perfect. “He cut them in half, and put the halves opposite each other, but the birds he did not cut.” He sat down to take care that birds on the wing should do no damage to the divided animals, and he kept that watch through the whole day. “Other birds, however, swooped down on the divided carcasses, and Abram sat with them. Now, at sunset Abram fell into a trance and, lo, a terrible gloom came upon him.”⁷ Why at sunset, when already the day had reached evening? God wants to make him more attentive in every way; a trance and terrible gloom fall upon him for the reason that through what happens he may gain some sense of seeing God—this, after all, being God’s way invariably. Later, remember, when God was on the point of giving the Law and the Commandments to Moses on Mt. Sinai, “there was darkness and a hurricane,” the text says, “and the mountain smoking.”⁸ Hence Scripture also says, “He touches the mountains and they smoke.”⁹ You see, since it is impossible to see anything incorporeal through these physical eyes, he wants to convey to him his characteristic activity. Accordingly, when that just man was terrified and fear struck

7. Gen 15.11–12. The Greek version of v. 11 differs from the Hebrew and represents Abram’s reactions strangely. Chrysostom, of course, who had made an individual point in the previous homily of the vision of 15.1 occurring at night, has now some explaining to do with reference to day in v. 10 and sunset in v. 12: unable to have recourse, like modern critics, to diversity of sources and traditions, he dodges the issue with hardly a comment and a tangential digression.

8. Apparently a composite text of Chrysostom’s, recalling Exod 10.22, 19.18; Deut 4.11, 5.22.

9. Ps 104.32.

his mind as well as the trance that had developed, word came to him (the text says): You asked, God said, How shall I know? and you wanted to get a sign of the way you were destined to inherit the land. Behold, I am giving you a sign: you need great faith to learn that I can bring things from desperate straits to optimistic prospects. "Abram was told, 'You shall surely know that your descendants will be inhabitants of a land that is not theirs, and people will enslave them, maltreat and humiliate them for four hundred years. My judgment, however, will fall on whatever people they are enslaved by, and later they will depart from there with great possessions.'"¹⁰

(7) A wonderful statement, requiring a robust spirit capable of rising above every human consideration and leaving it behind. I mean, if the patriarch had not possessed a noble and manly spirit and good sense too, these words would have been sufficient even to alarm him. "‘You shall surely know,’" the text says, remember, "‘that your descendants will be inhabitants of a land that is not theirs, and people will enslave them, maltreat and humiliate them for four hundred years. My judgment, however, will fall on whatever people they are enslaved by, and later they will depart from there with great possessions.’" Do not be surprised, he says, as you have eyes for yourself, your old age, Sarah's sterility and the barrenness of her womb, nor think that I have said anything remarkable in the word, "‘I will give this land to your descendants.’" It is not only this that I foretell to you, but also the fact that your very descendants as well will be led off to a foreign land. He did not say, to Egypt, nor did he state the name of the land, but said, "a land that is not theirs"; they would undergo slavery and hardship, and suffer, not for a short time nor a small number [345] of years, but for four hundred years. Certainly I will wreak vengeance on them, and my judgment will fall on that people that enslaves them, and thus I will cause them to return from there with great possessions—in the one word foretelling to him precisely the things due to

10. Gen 15.13–14.

happen afterwards and revealing the enslavement, the descent into Egypt, the wrath which the Egyptians were due to experience on their account, and their return in glory. He shows him that it is not only in his case that developments beyond the limits of nature will occur and despite such great obstacles the outcome promised by God will reach a conclusion, but in the case of all his descendants as well this will occur. These things, however, he says, I already told you so that before you end your life you might be in a position to know the things about to happen in turn to your descendants.

(8) “‘You, however,’” he says, “‘will go to your fathers after reaching a fine old age.’”¹¹ He did not say die but “go,” as if he were due to travel on and move from one homeland to another. “‘You will go to your fathers,’” he says, not to fathers in the flesh; after all, how could he, since his own father was an infidel, and it wasn’t possible that the patriarch, believer that he was, would go to the same place as he had gone. “There is a great gulf,” Scripture says, remember, “between us and you.”¹² So why had he said, “‘to your fathers’”? Referring to good men, like Abel, Noe, Enoch. “‘After reaching a fine old age’”: perhaps someone may say, What kind of a fine old age could he have had, spending a life full of troubles? But don’t have regard for that, O man; instead, consider as well his notoriety on every occasion and the manner in which esteem came the way of this stranger, this refugee, bereft of hearth and home, and the degree of support he enjoyed from God at all times.

(9) Accordingly, don’t judge affairs by current values, nor think a fine old age consists in living in luxury and gluttony, or gaining wealth and hordes of servants and crowds of slaves. I mean, far from constituting a fine old age, this would bring heavy condemnation on the person showing no self-

11. Gen 15.15 in a text that departs from Hebrew and LXX, not only in omitting “in peace,” which would have been grist to Chrysostom’s mill, but in making the gross copyist’s/reader’s error of reading Greek *tapheis* (“buried”) as *trapheis* (“brought to,” “nourished”)—something Chrysostom perhaps suspects, as he uncharacteristically allows the word to pass without comment.

12. Luke 16.26.

control in old age or giving no heed to anything appropriate to a person at his last gasp but rather wolfing food day in day out, panting after drunken orgies, and doomed to give an account of it all not long after. Of course, the person who lives his life with such great virtue has truly reached a fine old age before ending his days, and for the troubles of this life will gain reward and recompense. Hence, Scripture says: While these things will happen to your descendants, you will pass on after reaching a fine old age. Consider further in this case how, unless the just man's valor had been considerable and his good sense extraordinary, these very events also would have been sufficient to derange his thinking. I mean, he would have said, [346] had he been an ordinary man: Why does he promise to cause so many descendants to issue forth from me if they were fated to be beset with so many troubles and to endure slavery for so great a number of years? What good is that to me? The just man, however, had no such thoughts; instead, like a grateful servant he submitted to everything coming from God and gave precedence to his judgments ahead of his own preferences.

(10) Then God also indicates to him the time of their return from slavery: after quoting the number of years as four hundred the text goes on, "But in the fourth generation they shall return here."¹³ At this point, however, someone may raise the difficulty of how he said they would be slaves for four hundred years whereas in fact they spent not even half that time in Egypt. The reason he did not say they would spend four hundred years in Egypt but "in a land that is not theirs" was that it might be possible to calculate the years they spent down in Egypt from the time the patriarch was ordered to leave Charran. Scripture, you recall, revealed to us also his age at that time in saying that he was seventy-five years old when he left Charran.¹⁴ So from that time till the Exodus from Egypt, if you want to check it, you will find the

13. Gen 15.16. Editors of the Hebrew text warn us against as specific a translation as "generation," to avoid the complicated calculations that Chrysostom and his editors are obliged to go into at this point.

14. Gen 12.4.

number correct. Another equation is possible, however, that the Lord in his loving kindness always measures his punishments by our limitations, so when he saw them suffering and the Egyptians giving evidence of great cruelty to them, he inflicted his vengeance before the set time and led them to freedom. You see, that is the way with him: since in every way he devises our salvation, even if he threatens to punish us, yet if we resolve to give evidence of real conversion, he revokes his sentences. On the other hand, even if he promises to provide us with some benefit, he likewise does not put his promise into effect lest we prove to be the worse off on that score.

(11) All this you will find to be the case to the extent that you are devoted to the reading of the holy Scriptures. "But in the fourth generation," the text says, remember, "they shall return here, for the iniquities of the Amorites will not have run their course until then." That will be the moment, it means, for bringing them to freedom and for the enemy to be punished for the extent of their sins and to be driven from the land. So both events will occur at the appropriate time—their redemption and the expulsion of the enemy. In this way, you see, the text says, their iniquities will have run their course, as if someone were to say, To that point they had not committed sin to such an extent as to sustain such dreadful punishment. Being loving as he is, you see, far from imposing harsher penalties than their sins deserve, he imposes much less. The reason he gives evidence of longsuffering even in their regard is that they may bring punishment on themselves and thus have no excuse.

(12) Do you see how precisely he brought everything home to the patriarch so as to strengthen his faith in every way and enable him to have confidence from the words spoken to him that even the events affecting his descendants would take effect, and [347] from what was said previously he might likewise gain a solid faith that what had concerned himself as well had of necessity already been implemented. Then, when the prophecy had been fulfilled, he also received an adequate sign of the events that affected him. "After the sun had set,"

the text goes on, "flames appeared, and lo, there was a smoking oven and fiery torches that passed between the cut portions."¹⁵ The flames, oven and torches revealed to the just man the stability of the covenant and the presence of God's activity. Then, when everything had been fulfilled and completed and the fire had consumed the offerings, "On that day," the text goes on, "the Lord made a covenant with Abraham, saying, 'To your descendants I will give this land from the river of Egypt to the great river Euphrates, the Kinites, the Kenezites, the Kedmonites, the Chettites, the Pherezites, the Raphaim, the Amorrites, the Canaanites, the Evites, the Gergesites and the Jebusites.'"¹⁶ See how once more by the repetition he confirms his promise to Abram. "He made a covenant," the text says, "saying, 'To your descendants I will give this land.'" Then, so that the just man could realize from the extent of the land and the length of its boundaries how far his descendants would be distributed, he added, "From the river of Egypt to the river Euphrates"—such, he says, will be the extent of your descendants. Notice how by every means he wants to bring out to him the extraordinary size of the multitude: having previously said that he would cause it to be counted by the great number of the stars, in this instance too he made clear the length of the boundaries so that in this way as well Abram might learn the extent of the multitude there would eventually be. In addition to this he makes particular mention of those nations whose occupancy he was about to cede to Abram's descendants, so that in every way he might convey greater certitude to the good man. Though such wonderful promises had been made, Sarah still remained childless and old age pressed further upon them, so that in giving a remarkable sign of their faith they saw both the limitations of human nature and the greatness of God's power.

(13) Lest, however, we once more prolong the instruction to great length, let us call a halt to the development of our theme at this point and bring the sermon to a close by urging you to become imitators of the patriarch. Consider, dearly

15. Gen 15.17.

16. Gen 15.18-21.

beloved, in view of the words he addressed to the king of Sodom and more especially all the virtues he gave evidence of throughout his whole life how great a reward he was accorded and how much considerateness the Lord evinced in his regard, revealing through the events affecting the patriarch the extraordinary degree of his generosity to us all and the fact that, despite our only being able to anticipate him with the slightest display on our part, he rewards us with wonderful gifts without delaying at all, provided we show sincere faith in the manner of this just man and never vacillate in mind but rather maintain a steady disposition. On these grounds, after all, this man won a reputation: listen to Paul's eulogy of the faith he showed right from the outset. "At the call of faith," he says, remember, "Abraham obeyed the command to depart for the place he was due to occupy, and he set out without knowing where he was going,"¹⁷ referring to that statement from God, "'Go [348] forth from your country, onwards to a land that I will show you.'"¹⁸ Do you see his unshakable faith? Do you see his steady disposition?

(14) Let us in turn imitate this and go forth from the affairs of the present life with enthusiasm and relish, and travel to heaven. It is possible, you see, if we are willing, to take the road for that goal while still living here when we perform deeds worthy of heaven, when we are not caught up in the affairs of the world, when instead of chasing after the empty glory of this life we rather scorn it and devote ourselves to longing after that true and everlasting glory, when instead of being captivated by extravagance in dress and being anxious to deck out the body we exchange all this external adornment for care of the soul and do not permit ourselves to let it go bare and bereft of the garments of this virtue, when we mock luxury, when we avoid gluttony, when far from looking for parties and banquets we are content with frugality in keeping with the apostolic exhortation that says, "having food and shelter we will be content with these."¹⁹ What good, after all,

17. Heb 11.8.

19. 1 Tim 6.8.

18. Gen 12.1.

tell me, is overabundance, bursting the stomach with excessive eating, or impairing the sense of judgment from immoderate drinking? Isn't that the source of all the troubles of body and soul? Whence come those manifold ills and paralysis of limbs? Is it not from your going to excess in loading the stomach? Whence come acts of adultery, impurity, robbery, greed, murder, piracy and the complete ruination of the soul? Is it not from letting desire go beyond the bounds of moderation? You see, just as Paul called avarice the root of all evils,²⁰ so one would not be wide of the mark in naming as the source of all evils intemperance and our desire to go beyond the proper limit in everything. After all, if we were prepared in matters of diet, clothing, shelter and all our other bodily needs not to let our desires run riot but to look only for what was needed, the human race would be relieved of great harm.

(15) I am at a loss to know, however, how each of us according to his own ability welcomes this infection of greed and shows no anxiety to keep within the bounds of need; instead, quite at variance with the apostolic exhortation in the words, "Having food and shelter, we will be content with these,"²¹ we do everything in this way without realizing that we will be held to account for all our excesses beyond limits of necessity on the score of abusing the things provided us by the Lord.²² You see, it was not only for us to serve our own enjoyment that he provided us with these things but that we might alleviate the neediness of our fellows. So how could they deserve pardon who give evidence of vanity in their clothes and go to pains to dress in the threads of insects—a shocking thing that they pride themselves on whereas they ought be ashamed of it and fear and tremble on the score

20. 1 Tim 6.10.

21. 1 Tim 6.8.

22. Chrysostom's editor De Montfaucon chooses this point to vent his spleen on an admittedly disconcerting habit of the preacher, his syntactical inconsistency: "He begins with the first plural, then the third plural, then moves to second singular, and finally returns to third plural." Perhaps the point serves to document the thesis that the homilies betray signs of actual delivery rather than merely carefully written composition. See Introduction (7) and (12) in FOTC 74.

that while they get about like that for no good reason or subject to no need but merely out of vanity and show and the desire to be the object of public attention, someone else who is in fact of the same human nature goes about naked without a respectable cloak to wear.

(16) Not even nature itself provokes you to sympathy, nor does conscience stir you to assistance of your fellow, nor the thought of that dread day, [349] nor the fear of hell, nor the greatness of the promises, nor the fact that the common Lord of us all takes as done to himself what is done to our fellows. Instead, as if they had hearts of stone and were not part of human nature, they think they are now superior to mankind on account of the garments they wear, heedless of the great guilt they thus incur by wrongly disposing of what has been entrusted to them by the Lord; far from wanting to give some portion to their fellow slaves, they are happy to have it consumed by moths and thus are already fuelling the fire of hell in prodigal manner for themselves. After all, even if people of wealth distributed to the needy all they had stored up, not even in this way would they escape the punishment for continuing to live luxuriously in matters of clothing and diet. I mean, how could those people not fail to deserve punishment who go to all kinds of trouble to dress up in silken garments and strut around in public decked out in clothes of gilt or otherwise embroidered while despising the naked Christ and declining to supply him with necessary sustenance?

(17) These words, I should remind you, are particularly applicable to women: among them you would find a greater degree of vanity and intemperance, and the habit of wearing gold-encrusted dresses and golden adornments on the head, around the throat and on other parts of the body, as well as taking a lot of pride in all this. How many poor people's stomachs could have been filled and how many bodies reduced to nakedness could have been covered merely with the proceeds of what dangles idly and to no purpose from their ears, to no one's advantage but only to the harm and damage of their soul? Hence the world's teacher, too, after saying, "Having food and shelter," then directs his remarks to women and

adds, "Let them not adorn themselves in braid or gold, in pearls or extravagant clothing."²³ See how he doesn't want them to be adorned in these things nor to wear gold adornments, pearls or extravagant dresses, but rather to apply real adornment to their souls and through the practice of good deeds to heighten the soul's beauty, and not to have to despise it as it hankers after these things for being defiled, squalid, clad in rags, wasted with hunger and frozen with cold. You see, the very anxiety about beautifying the body betrays its ugliness, luxurious diet makes clear its hunger, and extravagance in clothing shows up its nakedness.

(18) I mean, it is impossible for someone who cares for his soul and places great store by its loveliness and beauty to hanker after external adornment, just as, on the other hand, it is impossible for someone absorbed in external appearance, beauty of attire and adornments of gold to give much attention to the soul. After all, when will such a person manage to take account of anything that is proper or commence contemplating spiritual matters once he has given himself to earthly things and crawls on the ground, so to say, unable ever to draw breath, lying prone and weighed down with the burden of countless sins? In fact, it is impossible to bring home to you in words the number of maladies that spring from this behavior; instead, it suffices to leave to the conscience of the people absorbed in those things the thought of how many delusions they experience daily on that score. That is to say, either some of the gold crumbles, and a great storm and panic strikes the whole household; or a servant turns thief, and all are subjected [350] to stripes, torture and bonds; or some envious people hatch a plot and all at once relieve them of their possessions, to their great disappointment beyond all limits; or their business affairs take a turn for the worse and reduce them to extreme indigence, making their life more onerous than death; or something else befalls them and brings upon them deep gloom.²⁴ In short, it is not possible to

23. 1 Tim 2.9.

24. For all his exclusively scriptural interest as a preacher and his lack of reference to contemporary events, Chrysostom is nevertheless aware of his congregation's real life situation and capable of evoking it, as here.


find a soul absorbed in these things that is ever free from turmoil; instead, just as the waves of the sea can never be still or be counted owing to their great number, in just the same way you could not count the number of all the disturbances arising from that source.

(19) Hence, I beseech you, let us shun greed in all its forms and the tendency to exceed what is needful. True wealth, after all, real prosperity safe from default happens to be this: wanting what is necessary and disposing properly of what is over and above the necessary. Such a person, in fact, will never fear indigence nor endure insult nor be subjected to turmoil; rather, he will be beyond calumny, will be free from the plotting of conspirators and, in a word, will enjoy unbroken peace, tranquility and harmony. And what is greater than all these, the very pinnacle of good things, such a person will have God's favor and enjoy abundant grace from on high for being a faithful steward of the things of the Lord. "Blessed is that servant," Scripture says, remember, "whom the master at his coming finds behaving this way,"²⁵ dispensing his possessions to his fellow servants in this way, not locking them up behind doors and bars nor allowing them to become the food of worms, but assuaging the neediness of the poor and proving a good and faithful steward of the things bestowed by the Lord so as to gain as well the great reward for this excellent management and be judged worthy to attain the promised blessings, thanks to the grace and loving kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, power and honor, now and forever, for ages of ages. Amen.

25. Luke 12.43.

HOMILY 38

"Now, Sarah, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had, however, an Egyptian maidservant, whose name was Hagar."¹

 TODAY'S [350] READING AS WELL BIDS OUR tongue follow the theme of the patriarch. Don't be surprised if after giving an exposition of this story on so many days we haven't yet been able to bring it to a close. You see, there is great richness in the just man's virtue, and the extent of his good deeds taxes every human tongue. What human being, after all, could worthily commend the man whom God rewarded and eulogized from on high? Still, even if we fall far short of doing him justice, at least we have dealt with him to the level of our ability and would like to encourage you to imitation and emulation of his virtue. The man's sound commonsense, remember, was sufficient to instruct the whole human race and to draw those willing to heed him to follow the way of virtue. Pay attention, however, I beseech you, to what is said so that we may come to learn the just man's commonsense from what was read just now. This passage, in fact, is capable of instructing both men and women to give evidence of harmony in relating to each other and to preserve inviolate the bond of marriage, to teach the husband not to contend against his wife but to make great allowance for her as being the frailer vessel,² and the wife not to disagree with her hus-

1. Gen 16.1. Unless Migne's text is faulty, Chrysostom is inconsistent throughout this chapter in aspiration in citing Hagar's name; we shall stay with "Hagar."

2. De Montfaucon defends Chrysostom's use of this term of women by commenting: "In the *Rule of Pachomius*, too, women are called 'frailer vessels'. But in Livy and other historians they are called *impedimenta*, 'baggage'." See Introduction (14) in FOTC 74. Cf. 1 Pet 3.7.

band, but to rival each other in carrying the other's burdens and to prize domestic peace [351] ahead of everything.

(2) It is necessary, however, to listen to the words themselves so that the teaching may become clearer to you. "Now, Sarah, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had, however, an Egyptian maidservant, whose name was Hagar." Consider in this passage, I ask you, dearly beloved, God's unspeakable longsuffering and the extraordinary degree of the just man's faith and gratitude of which he gave evidence with regard to the promises made to him. You see, though God had so often promised that he would give the land to his descendants, and that they would grow into such a great multitude as to be compared with the multitude of the stars, Abram saw that none of the promises had taken effect and that on the contrary the fulfillment of the promises was still at the level of words. Far from being disturbed in mind or shaken in his resolve he remained firm in his faith in the power of the one making the promises. Hence Sacred Scripture suggests as much in this passage too when it says, "Now, Sarah, Abram's wife, had borne him no children," as if to indicate to us that despite all these disappointments, despite the covenant made with him, despite the promise of an unnumbered multitude descending from him, he was not distressed, he held no doubts to see that none of the words had taken effect but quite the reverse. Hence it says despite all that, "Now, Sarah his wife had borne him no children," for you to learn that nothing further had happened to him despite the wonderful promises, and in fact Sarah's sterility and the infertility of her womb should have been enough to instill into him a deep sense of perplexity. The patriarch, however, far from regarding any longer the obstacles on the side of nature, realized instead the inventiveness of the Lord and the fact that, being creator of nature, he is able to find ways even where there are none, and so, like an obedient servant, he did not concern himself with the manner of fulfillment but left it to his inscrutable providence and had faith in his words.

(3) Hence it says, "Now, Sarah," despite such wonderful promises, "had borne him no children. She had, however, an

Egyptian maidservant, whose name was Hagar." It was not without purpose that Sacred Scripture even at this point made mention of the maidservant, but rather for us to learn from where she got her. The reason it added that she was Egyptian was that we might refer back to that incident and the fact that she was one of the things handed over by Pharaoh when he was the object of such awful vengeance from the God of all, and Sarah took her with her on her return; her name and race Sacred Scripture sedulously communicated to us. Notice, however, at this point Sarah's sensible attitude and the extraordinary degree of her self-control, as well as the patriarch's unspeakable faith and obedience. "Now, Sarah said to Abram in the land of Canaan," the text goes on, "'Lo, the Lord has stopped me from bearing children; so go into my maidservant so that you may have children by her.'"³ Notice the woman's excellent attitude: she said nothing of the kind that Rachel later said to Jacob, "'Give me children—if not, I'll die.'"⁴ Instead, what did she say? "'Lo, the Lord has stopped me from bearing children.'" Since the Creator of our nature has rendered me childless, she is saying, and has deprived me of progeny, accordingly, lest you remain without an heir on account of my sterility now that you have reached old age, "'go into my maidservant so that you may have children by her.'"⁵ A remarkable degree of good sense in the woman, beyond all telling: what woman would ever have elected to do this, either to give her husband this advice, or to cede the marriage bed to her maidservant?

(4) [352] Do you see how independent they were of any emotional influence? They had but one end in view, not to die childless; they were concerned how they might salvage some comfort from the situation and preserve intact the bond of peace. Consider, I ask you, the patriarch's great self-

3. Gen 16.2, with the addition by Chrysostom of "in the land of Canaan."

4. Gen 30.1.

5. In the Hebrew it is Sarah whose posterity will thus be assured—albeit by an ambiguous expression; the LXX and Chrysostom cut the Gordian knot by assigning posterity to Abram.

control in this incident and the extraordinary degree of his restraint: he didn't rant and rave against his wife for her childless condition, as some mindless people do, nor diminish his love for her. You know, of course, you well know how this of all things proves for the majority of men a cause of scorn for their wives,⁶ just as, on the other hand, they take the contrary as a basis for greater affection, quite stupidly and without reason attributing both sterility and fecundity to their wives without acknowledging that everything comes from nature's Creator and that neither intercourse nor anything else is capable of ensuring succession unless the hand from above intervenes and prompts nature to birth. Having a precise understanding of this, the just man did not attribute childlessness to his wife, and he continued to show her the proper regard. This was the reason, of course, that sensing his love she wanted to show how great was her affection for him, concerned not for herself but for a way in which she might devise some compensation for him for the lack of children; as though with her own hands, she took the Egyptian maid-servant and led her to her own marriage bed, while showing by her words the reason she had in consenting to do it—namely, Since I appear to be useless and unsuited for childbearing, for "the Lord has stopped me from bearing children."

(5) See her wonderful disposition of spirit in uttering no cross word nor lamenting her sterility; instead, the intention was simply to indicate to us that by attributing this to nature's Creator she bore it meekly and nobly, giving prior regard to God's decision ahead of her own desire and considering how she might console her husband. Since, she said, therefore, "the Lord has stopped me from bearing children." What tremendous import in these words of hers! how she demonstrates God's providence and ineffable power! She is saying, after all, just as we close and open our house, so too the Lord works on our nature, turning the key by his personal command and then opening it whenever he wishes and bidding

6. Chrysostom uses here as correlatives the generic *anthrōpos* (not *anēr*) and *gunē*. Cf. Introduction (14) in FOTC 74.

nature take its course. Since, then, she is saying, “the Lord has stopped me from bearing children, go into my maidservant so that you may have children by her.” I know that I am the cause of our childlessness; hence I don’t want to deprive you of consolation on this account. Perhaps, on the other hand, Sarah even suspected that the cause of their childlessness lay not with her alone but also with the patriarch; hence out of a wish to determine it by the course of events she yields place to her maidservant and leads her to the very marriage bed so as to learn from developments whether she should attribute it all to herself. “Abram consented to Sarah’s request.” Remarkable the just man’s commonsense: what I said before I say again, that he had not planned this previously despite being in advanced old age, and now being given this invitation by Sarah he readily consented to it, showing that it was not simply from desire nor in response to passion that he agreed to intercourse but so as to guarantee succession of his line.

(6) “Abram’s wife Sarah, after ten years of living with her husband Abram in Canaan, brought her Egyptian maidservant and gave her as a wife to her husband Abram.”⁷ Consider [353] the precision of Scripture: for us to learn that Sarah did not show haste in execution of the deed even after the words she had addressed to him, it goes on to say, “His wife Sarah brought her Egyptian maidservant Hagar,” as if Sacred Scripture wants to show us that it was to console his spouse and out of a wish to consent to her request that he agreed to the deed. I mean, so that you might learn with precision the patriarch’s self-control and the extraordinary degree of his restraint, it added, “After ten years of living with her husband Abram in Canaan.” It was not without purpose that even the time was conveyed to us, but for us to be in a position to know for how many years the good man showed his patience in nobly bearing his childlessness, prov-

7. Gen 16.3, where Chrysostom’s reading differs from Hebrew, and LXX in speaking of ten years of life together rather than just ten years’ residence in Canaan—an almost irrelevant comment Chrysostom has perhaps adjusted himself, though he later accepts and justifies it!

ing superior to all passion and giving evidence of great self-control.⁸ And not merely this, but also for us to learn something else from the incident, it added, "After ten years of living with her husband Abram in Canaan." It did not at this point reveal to us the total period of their living together but the period spent by them in Canaan. What was the reason of this? Well, the loving Lord had promised him immediately on arrival in Canaan, "'To your descendants I will give this land,'" and again afterwards more than once he had made the promises to him so that you might know, dearly beloved, for how many years the Lord had postponed putting his promises into effect without the good man being disturbed in mind; rather, he had placed greater reliance on God's words than on his own thoughts. Hence it says, "After ten years of their living together in Canaan."⁹

(7) Do you see the valor of his soul, do you see his practice of commonsense, how the Lord wishes to make him more conspicuous and so defers the promise? You see, since he is concerned for his servants, he does not simply want to bestow kindnesses on them but also to bring them to public attention and cause their faith to be made obvious. In other words, if after promising to give the land to his descendants he had immediately opened Sarah's womb and granted him succession of his line, he would not in this manner have revealed an extraordinary marvel nor would the just man's faith have been rendered conspicuous to everyone. I mean, while on the other hand God's power would then have been manifested, since once again he had personally with his own power brought to life nature's work place that had been dead and had proved useless for childbearing, yet the patriarch would not have been crowned in the way he now was for the trial of his virtue for such a length of time and its daily becoming more resplendent.

8. Does Chrysostom portray Abram instead of Sarah as the object of Scripture's implied encomium here for altruism?

9. Now Chrysostom alters his text somewhat in the direction of Hebrew and LXX—to support the rather different point he has been making, Abram's virtue instead of Sarah's.

(8) For you to learn that it is not only his wish to bestow kindnesses and provide gifts at his hand, but it is his custom also to cause their recipients to be more conspicuous, see him practicing this also in the case of the Cananite woman, postponing and delaying, for the purpose not only of granting her request but also of bringing her to the attention of the whole world. When she approached him, remember, making her request in these words, “‘Have pity on me, Lord, my daughter is possessed by an evil spirit,’”¹⁰ merciful and loving though he is, always anticipating our requests, he did not vouchsafe her a reply. The disciples for their part did not realize what was going to happen, and that it was because of his concern for the woman and his wish that her treasure [354] not be hidden that he did not reply; so they approached him like people all the more moved, and besought him in these words, “‘Grant her relief, because she comes shrieking after us,’”¹¹ as if to show that they still had no patience with her insistence. “‘Grant her relief,’” they said, note, not because she was deserving of pity or because her request was eloquent, but “‘because she comes shrieking after us.’” So what did the Lord do? Wishing to reveal little by little even this woman’s treasure and to teach them how far they fell short of his loving kindness, he gave a reply which was capable of devastating her thinking, had her mind not been on the alert, her desire alive and her enthusiasm heightened, and capable also of causing them to desist from entreaty on her behalf. “‘I was not sent,’” he said, remember, “‘except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’”¹² While causing them to desist from entreaty on behalf of the woman, on the other hand, far from making her less insistent, he even made her become more demanding. This, you see, is what a suffering soul is like, making supplication with warmth of manner; it heeds nothing that is said, considering one thing alone—how to gain the object of its endeavors—as the woman did, too. Hearing this, the text repeats, “she fell at his feet and said,

10. Matt 15.22.

12. Matt 15.24.

11. Matt 15.23.

'Have pity on me, Lord.'"¹³ She knew the Lord's pity, and for that reason she applied considerable pressure.'

(9) Notice in turn, however, the wise and inventive Lord: far from acceding to her request at this point, he delivered an even more severe and abrasive reply. You see, he knew the woman's fortitude, and his intention was that she should not escape notice in receiving the favor but rather that the disciples as well should discover the reason for his reluctance and everybody else learn the power of entreaty and the woman's great virtue. He said, you recall, "'It's not right to take the children's bread and toss it to puppies.'"¹⁴ Consider in this case, I ask you, the woman's perseverance in being fired with the ardor of enthusiasm, borne up by her faith in God, with her very entrails, so to say, torn asunder, and aching with concern for her daughter, far from being deterred by the haughtiness of the reply she is prepared to accept the remark about pups and confesses she is a pup so as to be acquitted of the ferocity of dogs and be admitted at once into the ranks of sons. Listen now to the woman's reply so as to learn how great an advantage came from God's reluctance: not only did the severity of his words to her not deter the poor creature, but it even prompted her to greater earnestness. When she heard those words, remember, she said, "'True, Lord; even the puppies eat some of the scraps that fall from their master's table.'"¹⁵

(10) Do you see why he gave evidence of reluctance to that point? So that we might learn from the woman's words the extraordinary degree of her faith. I mean, see how the Lord immediately sang her praises and rewarded her, saying, "'O woman, great is your faith.'"¹⁶ With admiration and praise he sent on her way the woman who originally had not been vouchsafed a reply from him. "'Great is your faith,'" he says. Truly great it was, in fact, for being refused her request over and over again without losing heart or desisting but rather winning him over with the persistence of her supplication and

13. Matt 15.25 in a variant reading.

14. Matt 15.26.

16. Matt 15.28.

15. Matt 15.27.

causing him to put into effect her request. "Let it be done to you," he said, remember, "as you wish." Do you see how he, who previously had not even deigned to reply, now plies her with favors? Nor did he [355] simply grant her request but sang her praises and rewarded her, and by saying, "O woman," he showed how he was struck by her faith, and by saying, "Great is your faith," he made clear to us the woman's wealth. Then he said, "Let it be done to you as you wish": whatever you want, whatever you wish, this I grant you. In other words, such extraordinary supplication demonstrates your worthiness of the request. Do you see the woman's perseverance, do you see the reason for God's reluctance and the fact that out of his wish to make her more conspicuous he consequently kept putting her off?¹⁷

(11) Let us, however, if you don't mind, return to the story before us to learn that for so many years he did not put into effect the promises made to the patriarch for no other reason than that he might grant them to him with great publicity and draw to everyone's attention the just man's faith. Hence the text reads, "after ten years of their living together in Canaan," so that you may learn how much time passed from the time he received the promises. Immediately on arriving in Canaan, remember, he heard that "to your descendants I will give this land," and for such a long period of time he had remained childless and Sarah's sterility was accentuated. "She gave Hagar as a wife to her husband Abram," the text reads. See how much commonsense was practiced by them in olden times, how men were continent and gave a great example of self-control, and women proved to be above jealousy. Of set purpose, you see, Scripture says, "Sarah brought her maidservant Hagar," and immediately goes on to say, "and gave her as a wife," so that you may learn how disinterested she was in putting the scheme into effect and how great was

17. De Montfaucon notes the resemblance of this treatment of the pericope of the Canaanite woman in Matt 15 to Chrysostom's commentary on the gospel (not to mention a recurrence in Homily 44)—a case that reminds us of the similarities between his Genesis homilies and sermons in places. See Introduction (7) in FOTC 74 for the likely explanation of such similarities.

the degree of their commonsense. "He went in to Hagar," the text goes on, "and she conceived."¹⁸ See how Sarah obtains the proof that the cause of their childlessness lay not with the good man but with her own sterility, intercourse leading immediately to conception.

(12) Now, however, on the contrary, see the ingratitude of the maidservant and the frailty of woman's nature so that you may learn in this instance as well the patriarch's great restraint. "She saw that she was pregnant," the text goes on, "and her mistress was shown scant respect by her." This, you see, is the way with servants; if they happen to gain some slight advantage, they can't bear to stay within the limits of their station but immediately forget their place and fall into an ungrateful attitude. This is what happened to this maidservant, too: when she saw the change in her figure, she gave no thought either to her mistress's ineffable forbearance, nor her own lowly station, but became arrogant and self-important, scorning the mistress who had shown such great regard for her as even to bring her to her husband's very marriage bed. So what did Sarah do? "She said to Abram," the text goes on, "'I am being wronged on your account. Lo, I gave my maidservant into your arms, but when she saw she was pregnant, I was shown scant respect by her. Let God judge between you and me.'"¹⁹ In this case, I ask you, consider the just man's unspeakable longsuffering and the regard he shows for Sarah, begging pardon of her for this unreasonable accusation. I mean, it was she who gave her maidservant into her husband's arms, she who said, "'Go in to my maidservant,'" she who of her own accord urged him to have intercourse, whereas now she changes her mind and says, "'I am being wronged on your account.'" After all, O woman, he did not take the initiative in running off to have intercourse with your maidservant, did he? It wasn't at the spur of lust that he rushed into the affair, was it? He did it in response to you [356] and your direction—so why are you aggrieved with your husband? "'Lo, I gave my maidservant into your arms.'"

18. Gen 16.4.

19. Gen 16.5.

Well, if you admit that you yourself gave her and he didn't take her on his own initiative, why do you claim injustice? All right, she says, if in fact I did give her, still once you saw her frowardness you should have corrected her insolent attitude; after all, "once she saw she was pregnant, I was shown scant respect by her. Let God judge between you and me."

(13) Really, all these words were women's words, coming from the frailty of her nature, as if to say this to him: I for my part wanted to console you for your childlessness, so I demonstrated so much concern as to hand over to you my maidservant with my own hands and encourage you to have intercourse with her; whereas when you saw her becoming arrogant on account of the change in her figure and filled with self-importance, you should have corrected her and punished her for disrespect shown me, but instead of doing so you were prepared, as if forgetful of all that had happened before, to despise me, the one who had lived with you for so many years and am now being mocked by my Egyptian maidservant. "Let God judge between you and me": the cry of a tortured soul. Had the patriarch not been a man of good sense, and had he not shown great concern for Sarah, he would have been distressed by these words and have fallen into depression at her remarks. This remarkable man, however, had regard to the frailty of her nature and made complete allowance for her. "Let God judge between you and me."²⁰ Consider, she is saying, what an awful exploit I deigned to be involved in for your comfort, in my wish for you to have the name of father at least in your old age, and so I elevated my maidservant to my own position, whereas you saw her behaving ungratefully but did not chide her, you did not reward me for the care I showed you. He who understands the secrets of each person's mind, she is saying, he will be judge between us and decide how I for my part proved superior to every passion in placing your comfort ahead of mine and bringing my maidservant into the marriage bed,

20. For a preacher who has only reached ch. 16 of Genesis after 38 homilies, Chrysostom is permitting himself the luxury of exploiting all the emotive potential of this incident.

whereas you took no account of what was happening to me and allowed her to take advantage of my restraint, you did not check her insolence or restrain her ingratitude.

(14) So what was the response of the man of steel, God's noble athlete, who won recognition for his deeds on all sides? See what he says to her to show his characteristic virtue in this as well: "'Lo, your maidservant is in your hands; treat her whatever way seems best to you.'"²¹ Wonderful common-sense in the just man, extraordinary the degree of his long-suffering; not only did he not get upset by the words from Sarah but he even makes reply with extreme restraint, saying, You suspect me of being the cause of the insults shown you, and you think I take satisfaction in what was done by the maidservant because on one occasion she shared the marriage bed with me; accept the fact that in the first place, had I not been prepared to take your advice, I would never have agreed to take the maidservant into your marriage bed. As it is, to make quite sure through the facts themselves, lo, she is in your hands, "'treat her whatever way seems best to you.'"²¹ I mean, no one has undermined your authority, have they? No one has deprived you of your position, have they? After all, even if I consented to have intercourse with her, you still have your authority and she is in your hands: punish her, chide her, chastize her, wreak upon her whatever is your will and desire—only don't get upset, don't blame me for her fractious behavior. You see, it was not [357] under the impulse of my own desire that I consented to have intercourse with her with the result that I should accord her any unreasonable preference out of my passion for her from that incident. I know the respect due to you, I am not unaware of servants' ingratitude. She has no claim on me, she is not a concern of mine; one thing alone concerns me, to keep you undisturbed, without distress, free from any sorrow and enjoying the highest respect.

(15) This is a true relationship, this is the duty of a husband, while not taking too much notice of his wife's words

21. Gen 16.6.

but making allowance for natural frailty, to make it his one concern to keep her free from anguish and tighten the bonds of peace and harmony. Let husbands take heed and imitate the just man's restraint in according their wives such great respect and regard and making allowances for them as the frailer vessel so that the bonds of harmony may be tightened. This, you see, is real wealth, this is the greatest prosperity, when a husband is not at odds with his wife but rather they are joined together like one body—"the two will come to be one flesh,"²² Scripture says. Such couples, be they even in poverty, be they in low estate, would be more blessed than all the rest, enjoying true delight and living in unbroken tranquility, just as those who don't enjoy this have to put up with jealousy and lose the advantage of peace. Even should they abound in wealth, have luxurious tables and happen to live in the glare of publicity, they still live a more miserable life than anyone, day in day out experiencing troubles and disturbances, suspecting one another, unable to have any joy as the conflict within them causes total confusion and creates complete disgust within them. In the present instance, however, there was nothing like that; instead, the patriarch both allayed the mistress's anger and by giving her complete authority over her maidservant he filled his house with unbroken peace.

(16) "Sarah maltreated her," the text goes on, "and she fled from her presence." That is to say, probably because she punished her insolence, the maidservant took to flight. That is the way with servants, after all: whenever they are not permitted to have their own way but rather their efforts at independence are thwarted, immediately they throw off the yoke of their masters and take to flight. See once more in this incident, however, how much favor from on high the maidservant also enjoyed on account of the esteem for the just man: since she carried with her the just man's seed, accordingly she was accorded also the vision of the angels. "An angel of the Lord," the text goes on, remember, "found her at the

22. Gen 2.24.

spring in the desert on the Sour road."²³ Consider the Lord's loving kindness in overlooking no one; instead, even if she be a servant or maidservant he personally gives evidence of his characteristic providence for everyone, having regard not to the difference in status but to the disposition of soul. In this case, however, the angel appeared, not on account of the maidservant's position, but out of regard for the just man: as I said before, she was due to be shown great care for the reason of her being worthy to receive the just man's seed. "On discovering her," the text says, "the angel said to her, 'Hagar, maidservant of Sarah, where have you come from and where are you going?'"²⁴ See how even the angel's words made her mindful of her proper station: to make her more attentive, he immediately brought her name to the fore by saying, "'Hagar.'" We are accustomed, you see, to pay attention to people who call us by our name. Then he said, "'Maidservant of Sarah.'" He reminded her of her mistress, so that she might know that even if she shared her mistress's marriage bed countless times, [358] she still ought acknowledge Sarah as her mistress.

(17) Consequently, see the angel questioning her so as to put her in a position of having to reply: from where have you now arrived at this lonely spot, he says, and to what destination are you rushing off? The reason that the angel appeared to her as she found herself in this lonely spot was in case she should think it was just a chance traveler who was questioning her; it was a desert, you see, and nobody else was present, so for her to be in a position to know that it was not simply a chance traveler who was conversing with her, he accordingly appeared to her in the desert and questioned her. "She replied, 'I am running away from the presence of Sarah, my mistress.'"²⁵ Do you see how she does not deny her authority, but admits everything truthfully? It is not a human being who is questioning me, she says, of the kind that I could mislead: he forestalled me by mentioning my name and reminding me

23. Gen 16.7.

24. Gen 16.8, slightly altered to suit Chrysostom's running commentary.

25. Ibid.

of my mistress, so I for my part should speak the truth completely. "I am running away from the presence of Sarah, my mistress," she says. See how she recalled the fact objectively: she didn't say, She gave me a hard time; she didn't say, She maltreated me, and through my inability to put up with the intense persecution I took to flight; far from making any complaint she only accused herself of running away. Do you see her good disposition? See in turn the angel's words to her: "The angel of the Lord said to her, however, 'Return to your mistress and submit yourself to her control.'"²⁶ In response to her admission, "I am running away from the presence of my mistress," he says, "'Return,'" go back, don't be ungrateful to the one who has done you so many kindnesses. Then, since she had enraged her mistress from her superior airs and sense of importance, he says, "'and submit yourself to her control,'" be subject to her, as befits you, after all. Acknowledge your servitude, don't ignore her authority, don't get ideas above your station, entertain no high and mighty thoughts; "'submit yourself to her control,'" give evidence of your subjection.

(18) The angel's words adequately appeased her spirit, settled her thoughts, restrained her resentment and brought complete tranquility to her thinking. Then, in case you might think it was idly and to no purpose that she was accorded such wonderful care instead of learning that it was on account of the just man's seed that she enjoyed such great concern, see how he consoles her, restores her spirit and grants her abundant comfort in the following words: "The angel of the Lord said to her, 'I will greatly multiply your descendants, and there will be no numbering the multitude of them.'"²⁷ This I foretell to you, he says, that your descendants will be so numerous as to defy numbering. So do not lose heart or be dejected or get upset in your thinking; rather, let your complete obedience be evident. "'Lo, you are pregnant, remember, you will have a son and call him by the name Ishmael.'"²⁸ The reason, you see (he says), that I foretell the

26. Gen 16.9.

27. Gen 16.10.

28. Gen 16.11.

birth to you and already impose the name on the child to be born is that you may gain greater certainty and thus make your way back and soon put to rights your mistakes, "because the Lord has paid heed to your abasement," he says.

(19) Let us learn from this incident how great an advantage stems from adversities, how great the benefit of misfortune. I mean, after she left home and pangs of distress grew stronger and she felt the onset of great distress, living in solitude, isolation and deprivation after great prosperity and elevation to equality of status with her mistress, on that account she enjoyed prompt assistance. What I promised, he said, remember, will happen to you; you will have a son, and [359] your descendants will be beyond number, "because the Lord has paid heed to your abasement." So let us not on our part be distressed when we are humbled by some onset of problems. Nothing, you see, is so advantageous to our nature as humbling ourselves, having our self-importance lowered and our frowardness of spirit checked. Then in particular, after all, the Lord gives heed to us, when we listen to him with sorrowing spirit and contrite heart, bringing fervent supplication to our entreaties. "Because the Lord has paid heed to your abasement," the text reads.

(20) Then he foretells the occupation of the child due to be born: "He will be a rough, uncultivated type," he went on; "his hand will be raised against everyone, and everyone's hand will be raised against him; he will take up his abode in opposition to all his brothers."²⁹ He predicts to her that he will be bold, warlike, and will exert himself greatly in tending the soil. Do you see in what happened to the maidservant the regard for the patriarch? I mean, the care for her shows the Lord's favor demonstrated towards the just man. After giving counsel in this way and announcing good tidings to Hagar, the angel departed. Notice again, however, the maidservant's gratitude: "She invoked the name of the Lord as he spoke to her, 'You are God, who watched over me,' or in other words,

29. Gen 16.12, where the Greek softens somewhat the unflattering reference to Ishmael.

'I saw him face to face as he appeared to me.' Hence she called the well 'Well Where I Saw Him Face to Face.' It is between Kadesh and Barach."³⁰ Consider how even she wants to leave a perpetual memorial to this place in its name: she called the place, the text says, "'Well Where I Saw Him Face to Face.'" Do you see the maidservant becoming gradually wiser from the hardship affecting her, giving evidence of deep gratitude for the kindness done her and acknowledging as far as in her lay the great care that had been accorded her. "Hagar bore Abram a son," Scripture goes on, "and to the child that Hagar bore him Abram gave the name Ishmael."³¹

(21) From this incident let us learn how great a good restraint is, how great an advantage we can gain even from afflictions. We see, on the one hand, restraint in the example of the patriarch appeasing Sarah's indignation, giving her authority over the maidservant and in this way filling the house with peace, while on the other hand we can see the advantage of afflictions in what happened to the maidservant. When she ran away, remember, after being maltreated by her mistress and putting up with great hardship, and after she called on the Lord in anguish of spirit, at once she was granted attention from on high. You see, for her to learn that she was accorded such wonderful care on account of her being humble and deferential, the angel said to her, "'You are pregnant, you will have a son and call him by the name Ishmael.'"

(22) Knowing, therefore, dearly beloved, that, if we are on the alert, afflictions rather recommend us to the Lord, and that then we will succeed in winning favor from him when we approach him with anguish of spirit and warm tears, let us not grieve in our afflictions but consider the advantage of afflictions and bear equally all occurrences; let us learn to be restrained and gentle with everyone, especially our wives, and take particular care not to be too demanding, even if they chide us, rightly or wrongly, but rather make it our sole concern to remove the cause of sadness and bring about a deep

30. Gen 16.13-14, where the Hebrew text is uncertain.

31. Gen 16.15.

sense of peace at home [360] so that the wife's attention may be devoted to her husband³² and he may be able to find refuge in a haven from external confusion and disturbance and find there utter consolation. The wife, after all, is given by way of assistance so that the husband, strengthened by her support, may succeed in withstanding assaults against him. You see, if she is discreet and restrained, not only will she provide her husband with comfort from their association but in all other respects as well she will give evidence of her great usefulness, rendering everything light and easy for him, not allowing him to find difficulty either in external matters or indeed in the problems that daily arise at home; instead, like a skilled pilot she will transform for him the storm of his spirit into calm by means of her particular wisdom, and by the understanding she shows she will provide him with deep comfort. Nothing of the affairs of this life, in fact, will succeed any longer in worrying people bound together in this manner, nor in undermining their contentment. You see, wherever there is harmony and peace and a loving relationship between wife and husband, all good things come together there and the couple will be safe from any stratagem, protected as they are by some wonderfully impregnable rampart, namely, their harmony in God's sight. This renders them stronger than steel, this makes them firmer than iron, this contributes to them more than all wealth and prosperity, this conducts them to glory on high, this also wins for them favor from God in generous measure.

(23) Accordingly, I beseech you, far from prizing anything more highly than this, let us move might and main to have peace and harmony in our family life. Then, you see, the children born of such union will follow the virtue of their parents, the servants will imitate them, in every respect the householder will advance in virtue and there will be great prosperity in our affairs. After all, when we give pride of place to God's concerns, everything else will go without hindrance for us and we will experience no sense of difficulty,

32. Chrysostom's phrase employs the language of Gen 3.16.

since God's goodness is supplying us with everything in generous measure. In order, therefore, that we too may pass this present life free from distress and may win favor from the Lord to a greater degree, let us hold fast to virtue, make it our concern to introduce harmony and peace into our home, attend to the orderly behavior of our children and give thought to the conduct of the servants, so that after receiving rewards to an extent beyond all others we may also be found worthy of those promised good things, thanks to the grace and loving kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, power and honor, now and forever, for ages of ages. Amen.

HOMILY 39

*"Now, when Abram was ninety-nine years old, God appeared to him."*¹



DO YOU SEE, [360] dearly beloved, how there is nothing idle in the contents of Sacred Scripture? Did you notice yesterday how in drawing to your attention the story of Hagar and her return home we gained considerable advantage from the exercise? We came to know, you recall, the patriarch's great restraint, the extraordinary degree of his self-control, the regard he showed for Sarah out of the value he placed on concord with her above all other things. We saw God's loving kindness beyond all telling, how on account of his regard for the good man he not only brought back [361] Hagar who had wandered in the desert and run away out of fear of her mistress, but also favored him with the birth of Ishmael, having in mind the great comfort this would bring to the just man and giving him a reward for his wonderful endurance. When Ishmael was born, Sacred Scripture, wanting to teach us the patriarch's age, indicated to us also the number of his years in saying that "when Ishmael was born, Abram was eighty-six years old."² At this point, however, let us look at the sequel, so that we may learn once again from what follows both the just man's great endurance and the Lord's ineffable and exceeding love.

(2) Now, we will know this precisely if we succeed once again in determining the years of the just man's life and the

1. Gen 17.1, a verse in which the Hebrew and LXX differ, and where Chrysostom differs slightly again.

2. Gen 16.6, reshaped somewhat by Chrysostom to make his point about the precision of Scripture. It is a pity Chrysostom's time could not provide him with the means to distinguish different narrative strands in the Genesis text and recognize the priestly contributor's fascination with chronology.

way the good God arranged the events that concerned him, testing his servant on each occasion and revealing the godliness of his attitude. Of course, he himself knew clearly ahead of time the sound dispositions of his servant, he appreciated the beauty of his spirit and recognized precisely the pearl that he was; yet since he also wanted to make him known to all the people of that time so that the just man's virtue might in future generations as well attract willing souls to emulation and imitation of him, accordingly he gradually unfolds the wealth of the just man's attitude so that we too may learn never to distrust God's promises, and instead of fretting at delay have confidence rather in what is not seen than in what is visible and before our eyes when the Lord of all makes the promise. We should also realize that it is not possible for what is promised by God ever to fall short of realization; rather, even if with the passage of a long period of time things contrary to God's promises transpire, our thinking should not be disturbed but we should consider the inventive and irresistible power of the one who promises and the fact that when he wishes to put his decisions into operation, everything yields and gives place. After all, since he is Lord of our nature and Creator, it is possible for him as well to bestow gifts surpassing nature.

(3) Consequently, let us not become curious about God's doings by having an eye to our own limitations, nor divide our mind in two by keeping in focus the natural way of doing things, but like dutiful servants recognizing the exceeding power of our Lord let us have faith in his promises and prove superior to natural limitations so that we may attain the promises, enjoy favor from on high and have reverence for God to the best of our ability. This, you see, is the greatest reverence for him on our part, to have confidence in his power even if to bodily eyes things are seen to be in opposition. Why are you surprised if in God's mind the greatest reverence is not to doubt? Even amongst our peers, when they promise something of this perishable and passing world, provided we don't doubt but rather have confidence in the one making the promise, all to a man consider the greatest sign

of respect the fact that we have obviously not wavered but have trusted in their promises. So if this happens among people who frequently change or on account of their limitations are incapable of translating decisions into action, how much more in the case of God ought we trust in his promise, even if a long period elapses in the meantime.

(4) These things, however, I remind you, were not idly said on this occasion; instead, it was for us to be in a position to know, when we came to the beginning of the text proposed to us today, how the loving God wanted to make the patriarch conspicuous to everyone, [362] and so gave evidence of a particular procrastination for such a great number of years without the just man getting upset, becoming fainthearted because of the length of time or giving up hope—rather, he was buoyed up on sound hope and thus in every way demonstrated the godliness of his attitude. Now, we will know precisely all the patriarch's virtue if we learn how much time elapsed in the meantime. You see, all this blessed Moses teaches us under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.³ So what does he say? When Abram obeyed God's direction, moved on from Charran and took himself into Canaan, he was seventy-five years old. As soon as he took possession of Canaan, God promised him he would give all the land to his descendants and would cause them to grow into such a great multitude as to defy numbering, like the sand and the stars. After this promise, many things befell the just man in the meantime, the journey down into Egypt on account of the famine, the abduction of Sarah and immediately God's providential intervention; again, after the return from there the abuse of Sarah at the hands of the king of Gerar⁴ and the immediate assistance from God. Though he saw all this happening to him after that promise, the just man was not upset in his thinking nor did he worry within himself why the recipient of such a

3. One of Chrysostom's frequent unequivocal statements of biblical inspiration, asserting the role of the human and divine authors, and employing Chrysostom's unusual term for inspiration, *enêchein*. See my "terminology."

4. Chrysostom is (consciously?) anticipating the events of ch. 20 to strengthen his case.

great promise should encounter so many awful trials day in day out and continue for so long without children. Instead, being a godly man he could not bring himself to submit to the limitations of his own reasoning what was done by God, and so he was content and accepted willingly God's decisions.

(5) After the tenth year he took Ishmael, his child by the maidservant, and considered that the promises had been fulfilled for him in the child. The patriarch was, you remember, the text tells us, eighty-six years old when Ishmael was born. The loving God, however, exercised the virtue of the just man for a still further period of thirteen years: when God saw that he had been purified like gold in a furnace⁵ for a long period of time, and had rendered the just man's virtue more conspicuous and resplendent, Scripture says, "when Abram was ninety-nine years old, God appeared to him again."⁶ Why did God delay so long? Not simply that we should get to know the just man's endurance and his great virtue, but for us to see as well the extraordinary degree of his power. You see, when nature lost its potency and was now useless for childbearing, his body being wasted and chilled with old age, to show his peculiar power God put into effect the promise. We must listen, however, to the very words spoken to him by God. "God appeared to him when he had reached ninety-nine years," the text says, "and said to him."⁷ But when you hear "appeared," don't suspect anything ordinary or think that divine, irresistible power was seen by bodily eyes, but rather imagine everything in a reverent manner.⁸

(6) So "God appeared to him," that is to say, of his own accord he granted him quite plainly a vision; considering him worthy of a providential gesture from himself and displaying

5. Cf. Wis 3.6.

6. This time the text of Gen 17.1 contains "again," not included previously by Chrysostom, nor by the LXX generally.

7. Again a different version of the text without foundation.

8. As we have had occasion to remark before, at Homily 17 n.2, anthropomorphisms in the scriptural text put Chrysostom at once on the alert in case his Antiochene congregation should fail to keep together those binomials—divine transcendence and considerateness for human limitations—which the Scriptures (as also that other Incarnation) eminently exemplify.

great considerateness, he addresses him in these words, "I am your God: be pleasing in my sight and prove yourself blameless, and I will lay down my covenant between me and you, and I will make you exceedingly numerous." Abraham fell on his face."⁹ [363] Excellent the just man's disposition, exceeding the good God's loving kindness for him! "I am your God," he says, as if to say, I am he who arranged things in your regard in various ways up to the present, who moved you on from your home and brought you here, who proved to be your champion each day, and rendered you superior to those plotting against you; he did not say, I am God, but "I am your God." See his great goodness in revealing his love for the just man through the addition of the pronoun: the God of the whole world, the Creator of everything, the Maker of heaven and earth says, "I am your God." Wonderful the manner of his esteem for the just man.

(7) This is the way the inspired authors are also accustomed to speak: just as on this occasion he deigned to be named after his slave, though being the common Lord of all, and we will find him later saying, "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,"¹⁰ so too are the inspired authors accustomed to say, "O God, my God," not to restrict his dominion to them but by way of a personal declaration of uninhibited desire. For human beings to do this, however, is nothing remarkable; but when he does it in regard to human beings, that is novel and surprising. Still, let us not marvel, dearly beloved, but listen to the words of the inspired author, "Better one person doing the will of the Lord than countless numbers of lawless people,"¹¹ and again blessed Paul's words, "They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, mistreated;

9. Gen 17.2-3, where the Greek versions lose the force of the patriarchal title, *El Shaddai*.

10. Cf. Exod 3.6.

11. Sir 16.3, an uncertain text where Chrysostom follows a marginal correction to one LXX MSS. It is also noteworthy that this *prophētēs* that Chrysostom takes as typical is a Wisdom author, confirming the usual sense for Chrysostom of an "inspired author" and hence applicable to all kinds of Old Testament (only) composers from psalmist and sage to major prophet.

the world was not worthy of them.”¹² While the inspired author of the Old Testament highlighted the one doing the Lord’s will as better than countless numbers of lawless people, blessed Paul, on the other hand, the world’s teacher, recalled all those good people under persecution, existing in straitened circumstances, in the words, “The world was not worthy of them.” By saying all the world, he contrasts it with those who are persecuted, those who are distressed, so that you may learn how great virtue is. Hence, too, the Creator of all says to the patriarch, “‘I am your God: be pleasing in my sight and prove yourself blameless.’” That is to say, far from overlooking the struggles of such marvelous virtue, “‘I will lay down my covenant between you and me, and I will make you exceedingly numerous.’” I will not simply cause you to grow into a multitude, but “‘an exceedingly great one’” as well, showing the great degree of development; and what he said previously, like the sand and the stars, the same thing he indicated in this instance by “‘exceedingly.’”

(8) The dutiful and godly servant was amazed to see God’s wonderful considerateness and his care for his servant; being mindful of his own nature, God’s goodness and invincible power, “he fell on his face,” showing forth in this manner his own prudence. Not only was he not rebellious, not being high-minded on account of the favor which had been shown him by God, but rather he humbled himself even further, “And he fell,” it says, “on his face.” This is what the prudent soul is like, since when it enjoys more confidence, it shows even greater reverence to God. [364] “For he fell,” it says, “on his face.” Despite such wonderful intimacy, the just man had an eye to himself and the limitations of human nature, and dared not look up, but by prostrating himself he gave evidence of greater reverence. So, see in response the ineffable generosity of the good God: “God spoke to him,” the text goes on, “in the following terms: ‘Lo, I am making this covenant with you. You will be the father of a host of nations; you

12. Heb 11.37–38.

will no longer be called by the name Abram—instead, your name will be Abraham, because I have appointed you father of many nations; I will make you numerous, I will make a nation of you, and kings will be descended from you.’”¹³

(9) Notice, dearly beloved, how he foretells everything clearly to the good man in this case, too, and, so as to give him greater certainty, he makes the addition of the syllable to his name in the words, “‘You will be father of a host of nations; you will not be called by the name Abram but Abraham, since I have appointed you father of many nations.’” That is to say, just as the former name suggested a crossing over from the other side (Abram, after all, means “traveler” in Hebrew, as is known by those with a knowledge of that tongue),¹⁴ so since he was destined to travel over from the other side into Canaan, consequently his parents gave him that name. Perhaps, however, someone may say, If in fact his parents were infidels, how did they come by this foreknowledge so as to give him a name suggesting something due to happen long after? This is an attribute of God’s inventive wisdom, managing such things often through the agency of infidels, and you will find many such things happening in other cases.

(10) Immediately, in fact, there comes to mind the name of Noe: it was not idly or by chance that his parents gave him that name—rather, it was to foretell the deluge due to take place five hundred years later. You see, for proof that it was not on account of his virtuous lifestyle that his father gave this name to his child, heed the clear statement of Scripture that Noe alone was found upright, faultless by comparison with his contemporaries. Scripture would not have kept silence, nor would it have been said Noe alone was upright, if

13. Gen 17.4–6 in a somewhat more restrained version than the Hebrew and some Greek texts.

14. In translating Abraham’s intriguing agnomen as “traveler” at Gen 14.13 (see note *ad loc.*), Chrysostom did not proceed as here to identify the two words on the basis of consonantal similarity—a move which attracts De Montfaucon’s stern correction. Chrysostom’s admission here that he is ignorant of Hebrew confirms a similar admission in Homily 4; see Introduction (3) and n. 6, in FOTC 74.

his father Lamech in turn was an imitator of the just man's virtue. Accordingly, when he was on the point of giving his child a name he said, "'He will be called Noe: he will surely bring us relief from our labors, the troubles of our hands, and from the curse the Lord God placed on the earth.'"¹⁵ Where, tell me, did he get the knowledge of what would happen after so many generations? "'He will be called Noe,'" the text says, note, "'for he will bring us relief.'" The word Noe in the Hebrew language means "relief." So since he alone was destined to be preserved when that dreadful flood overwhelmed the world and to provide some new beginning to existence for a later generation, hence he said, "'He will give us relief,'" calling the deluge relief.¹⁶ You see, just as the onset of the flood with its rush of water, in removing the evil of those wicked people, also cleansed the whole earth, affected as it was by the evil of its inhabitants, the victim of severe abuse and made unclean on account of the vices of its inhabitants, it also gave them relief in the form of punishment. "Death is relief for a man,"¹⁷ Scripture says, remember.

(11) Do you see how even through infidels in many cases he causes future events to be foretold? Well, in just the same way the patriarch's [365] parents gave him his name, making clear from the very outset that there would be a move and he would cross the river and come to a foreign land. So God is saying, Since the imposition of that name by your parents foretold your crossing from one side to the other, accept also the addition of this syllable so as to learn that it reveals to you that you will be father of many nations.¹⁸ See the precision of

15. Gen 5.29, with Chrysostom's own introductory clause.

16. De Montfaucon gives Chrysostom better marks for this essay into etymology; Speiser, who struggles to rescue the efforts of the LXX in the same direction, also warns that "biblical etymologies are not guided by linguistic considerations" (*Genesis* 41)—a view with which Chrysostom could sympathize from his tendency to approach them from his moral standpoint.

17. Job 3.23 in the LXX.

18. Again Chrysostom is wide of the mark with his etymologizing, though one could hardly fault him with his Antiochene interest in linguistic precision. As Von Rad, however, reminds us, "the name 'Abraham' is linguistically nothing else than a 'lengthening' of the simpler 'Abram,' which means 'my father (the god) is exalted'" (*Genesis*, p. 194).

the words: he did not say all nations but "many nations." You see, since there were other nations as well that he intended to drive out from there so that the just man's descendants might succeed to the inheritance, hence he said, "I have appointed you father of many nations." Knowing the greatness of your virtue, I will make you teacher of many nations, "I will make you numerous, I will increase your numbers over and over, I will make a nation of you and kings will be descended from you."¹⁹ Do not pass the expressions idly by, dearly beloved. I mean, if we consider the patriarch's age and the fact that he heard these words in extreme old age, we will be amazed both at the just man's faith and the extraordinary power of God's loving kindness in indicating that the descendants of a man now at death's door, so to speak, with limbs weakened and the prospect of death daily before him, would increase to such magnitude as to develop into many nations—and not only this, but "kings will be descended from you," he says. Do you see the extent of the promise? "I will increase your numbers over and over," he said: it was not without purpose that he inserted the duplication but to indicate to the just man the extraordinary size of the multitude.²⁰ You see, since by the addition of the syllable he had inscribed an indelible guarantee of the promise, as if on some monument, once more he says, "I will establish my covenant between myself and you, and your descendants after you in their generations, as an eternal pact, to be God for you."²¹ Not only in your regard, he says, will I give evidence of deep concern, but also for your descendants, even after your departure. See how he reinvigorates the just man's spirit by promising him that he will provide great care even for his descendants.

19. This time in quoting v. 6, Chrysostom goes from one extreme to the other: after the previously restrained form by comparison with the LXX, he now adopts the LXX and embellishes it to enhance the generosity of the promise. This has implications also, of course, for the provenance of the text of the homilies; see Introduction (7) in FOTC 74.

20. The double adverb *sphodra sphodra* found in most LXX texts, omitted originally by Chrysostom, is grist to his mill at this point, where he now omits the extra verb he employed before.

21. Gen 17.7.

(12) What is the force of this pact? “‘To be God for you,’” he says, “‘and for your descendants after you.’” This, in other words, will be the summit of good things, both for you and for your descendants. “‘I will give to you and to your descendants after you the land you occupy, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.’”²² On account of your virtue your posterity as well will enjoy my care, I will give them the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession, “‘and I will be their God.’” What is the meaning of “‘I will be their God’”? It means I will give evidence of deep concern, of great care, I will provide them with assistance from me in all situations, only “‘you must observe my covenant, you and your descendants after you in their generations.’”²³ I look for nothing else from you than obedience and gratitude, and I shall put into effect all that I promised.

(13) His intention then was to make his own those born of him and to turn them into his people so that in future the vast numbers that developed from them might not mingle with the nations whose lands they were meant to possess, especially since afterwards according to his prediction they were destined to undergo slavery in Egypt. So in case they should mix with [366] the races in Egypt even after falling into slavery, he imposed on the just man by way of a sign circumcision in these words, “‘This is the covenant which you shall observe between myself, you and your descendants after you in their generations. Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin.’”²⁴ Then to teach them, and also all of us, the reason why he gave that direction and the fact that he intended it to have no other purpose than to be a sign that the people had been dedicated to him, he said, “‘It will act as a sign of the covenant between me and you.’” Then he also prescribes the time that this ought be done. “‘Your child of eight days shall be circumcised, as also children born in the household or purchased for money—in short, all living among you, so to

22. Gen 17.8.

23. Gen 17.9.

24. Gen 17.10–11.

speak, shall receive this sign. Whoever is not circumcised on the prescribed day shall be rooted out for 'breaking my covenant' "²⁵—for breaking the command, he means.

(14) See the Lord's wisdom in knowing how inobservant future generations are likely to be, and so, as though putting a bit in their mouths, he gave them this sign of circumcision, curbing their unrestrained urges in case they should mingle with other peoples. You see, since he was aware of their lustful tendencies in not practicing restraint, even though it had been drummed into them²⁶ countless times to refrain from their irrational impulses, consequently he gave them a perpetual reminder with this sign of circumcision, as though fastening them in a chain, and set limits and rules to prevent them overstepping the mark instead of staying within their own people and having no association with those other peoples but rather keeping the patriarch's line uncontaminated, so that in this way even the fulfillment of the promises could be achieved for their benefit. It is like a man of self-control and good sense having a froward child: he puts limits and rules on him not to show his face outside the front door nor to be seen by passers by, and in fact oftentimes ties him up by the feet so as to succeed in this way in getting the better of his extreme indiscipline. Well, in just the same way the loving Lord also placed this sign of circumcision in their flesh, like shackles on their feet, so that with this reminder at home they might have no further need of instruction from others.

(15) The ungrateful and unresponsive Jews, however, even now when the right time has passed, insist on keeping circumcision and betray their juvenile attitude. I mean, why is it, tell me, that they insist on being circumcised now? At that time, after all, in case they were contaminated by those other lawless peoples, they were given that command; now, on the other hand, thanks to God's grace they have all been led to the light of truth—so what value is there in circumcision? I

25. Gen 17.12–14, in an abbreviated form.

26. Interestingly, Chrysostom here employs the word that he normally uses for the inspiration of the biblical authors, *encheîn*.

mean, getting rid of skin contributes nothing to freedom of spirit, does it? Didn't they listen to God's wise words, "'It will act as a sign of covenant,'" as if to show that they had need of a sign on account of their deep ingratitude? This, you see, is what often happens in human affairs. Since we have no trust in some people, we are keen to get from them a sign by way of pledge; similarly, the God of all, realizing the instability of their attitude, deigned to request this sign of them, not that this sign should remain forever, but that after the conditions of that time had come to an end the use of the sign would be cancelled. You see, just as whenever people ask for a sign and want to get a pledge, [367] the sign is removed at the time when the occasion for the arrangement comes to an end, so too in this case, since this sign had been introduced among you²⁷ on account of the patriarch's people becoming well known, it was appropriate that, after some of the races for whose sake they had adopted the sign had been utterly destroyed while others after them had made their approach to the light of truth, the people should no longer carry about the proof of their own ingratitude but be freed from it and return to their pristine nobility.

(16) Consider, after all, I ask you, the fact that that remarkable man—I refer to the patriarch—before receiving the command about circumcision (he was, remember, ninety-nine years old when he was given this command) had proved pleasing to God and as well had been countless times commended by the Lord. Since at this point the fulfillment of the promise was about to take effect, Isaac was due to be born, the race to be multiplied and the patriarch, on the other hand, to be transferred from this life, it was then that he received the command in such extreme old age so that what happened to the patriarch might prove to be a kind of law and rule for all coming later.

(17) For you to learn precisely, dearly beloved, that this contributes nothing to virtue of spirit, you can come to an

27. A strange use of the second person, which gives Chrysostom's editors pause.

understanding from the events themselves. Why does Scripture say, remember, “‘A child of eight days shall be circumcised’”? Now, I think this time was prescribed by the loving God for the following two reasons: firstly, that at that tender age the pain of circumcising flesh could be more easily borne; and secondly, that they might be instructed by the very actions that the event contributes nothing to the soul but acts as a sign. After all, a tender child, ignorant of what takes place, lacking any appreciation—what benefit could it gain for its soul from this? The good actions, you see, that belong specifically to the soul are those that are done by choice. Good behavior by the soul, after all, is to choose virtue and to shun evil; good behavior by the soul is not only not hankering after greater wealth but passing on one’s goods to the needy; good behavior by the soul is not to cling to present realities but to scorn them, on the one hand, and to contemplate future realities daily, on the other. Receiving a sign in the flesh, on the contrary—what sort of good behavior is that?

(18) The ungrateful and unresponsive Jews, however, despite the light of truth, are still seated in darkness and, despite the sun of justice shining and spreading its rays of light in every direction, they are still attached to the light of a lantern and, despite the age for solid food, they are still dependent upon milk, nor can they bring themselves to heed blessed Paul shouting aloud about the patriarch, “He received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith he showed while uncircumcised.”²⁸ See how in this respect he taught us both facts, that he received circumcision as a sign and, while still uncircumcised, he gave evidence of righteousness arising from faith. You see, in case the Jew should shamelessly maintain, Did not circumcision win righteousness for him? Accordingly this blessed man, schooled at the feet of Gamaliel, precise student of the Law, said, Don’t think, O shameless Jews, that circumcision was of any avail for righteousness for him: having given evidence of faith

²⁸ Rom 4.11.

[368] in the time when he was uncircumcised, he heard the words, "Now, Abraham had faith in God, and this was reckoned as righteousness in him."²⁹ So, being already in the condition of righteousness on account of faith in God, he then receives circumcision by way of sign; God firstly adds a syllable to his name, and afterwards orders circumcision so as to show that it was on account of his great virtue that he then admitted the good man to his friendship and for his sake those who would be descended from him. Just as when a person acquires a slave, he frequently changes his name and attire and makes every effort to render him obvious so that in every way he may proclaim his ownership, so too the God of all, as though wishing to mark him out now from other human beings, indicates through the addition of the syllable that he will be father of many nations, while through circumcision he indicates that they will be his chosen people, and the descendants due to be born from him have been marked out from the other nations.

(19) But they, for their part, in their characteristic blindness insist on still keeping circumcision of the flesh, not heeding Paul's words, "After all, if you undergo circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you."³⁰ The reason, you see, for the Lord's coming was to cancel all these things, and the reason for his fulfilling the entire Law was to replace the observance of the Law in future—hence blessed Paul's exclamation, "Whoever find their justification in the Law have fallen from grace."³¹ We, on the contrary, believe blessed Paul and accept a circumcision not the work of human hands. "You have been circumcised in him with a circumcision not the work of human hands, by putting off the sins of the flesh, with the circumcision of Christ."³² Then, to teach us more precisely what this kind of circumcision is, he added, "buried with him in baptism."³³ In other words, just as the sign of

29. Gen 15.6; cf. Rom 4.3.

30. Gal 5.2.

31. Gal 5.4.

32. Col 2.11.

33. Col 2.12. The length and intensity of this tirade against circumcision illustrate Chrysostom's feelings about the Judaism of his time. His principal biographer, Baur, accounts for it on the score of the Jews' influence in An-

circumcision distinguished them from the other peoples and showed their belonging to God, in just the same way in our case, too, circumcision by baptism achieved a more precise distinction and a separation of the believers from those who are not such. "In him," the text says, remember, "you have been circumcised with a circumcision not the work of human hands, by putting off the sins of the flesh." I mean, whatever in the former case circumcision achieved by way of putting off the flesh, in this case baptism achieves by way of putting off sins. That is to say, having once put off the sins of the flesh and put on clean apparel, let us remain in cleanliness, dearly beloved, and by being above the passions of the flesh let us attain to virtue.

(20) Let us who live by grace imitate him who lived by the Law, or rather before the Law, so that we may conduct our lives by following in his footsteps and thus be judged worthy of meeting him face to face and of gaining eternal blessings, thanks to the grace and loving kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, power and honor, now and forever, for ages of ages. Amen.

tiach at this time (*John Chrysostom and His Time* 1, pp. 331–33); cf. also D. S. Wallace-Hadrill, *Christian Antioch* (Cambridge, 1982) and R. Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews* (Berkeley, Calif., 1983). Yet it must be admitted such outbursts are infrequent in the Genesis homilies, despite the subject matter.

HOMILY 40

"God said to Abraham, 'Sarah your wife will not be called Sarah; instead, Sarrah will be her name.'"¹



OME [368] NOW, let us spread before you the leftovers from yesterday's table and let us desire the goal of today's sermon—or, rather, the blessing and promise that the God of all made to the patriarch. But when you hear "table leftovers," don't form an impression of anything material; you see, the leftovers from food are not the same as spiritual [369] leftovers: while the former don't provide eaters with the same enjoyment once they have gone stale, but if left a day or two become completely useless, these other leftovers, on the contrary, provide equal benefit even if left not for a day or two, but for all time, without losing their taste. They are from God, after all, and spiritual, and far from risking any damage from the passage of time they show fresh attractiveness as each day passes and fill with great relish those wishing to enjoy them. So, since this is the efficacy of these leftovers, come now, be enthusiastic about satisfying your enjoyment of them, and let us have confidence in their efficacy as we set them before you, dearly beloved.

(2) In order, however, that the sermon may be clearer to you, we need to recall the close of yesterday's remarks so that by picking up the thread in this way we may link the instruction together. We brought to your attention the command about circumcision and God's words to the patriarch, "'Every male among you shall be circumcised, and it will act as a sign of the covenant between me and you. Your child of eight days shall be circumcised; whoever is not circumcised, that person

1. Gen 17.15.

shall be rooted out for breaking my covenant.'"² At this point we terminated our teaching on the matter of circumcision and, not to overwhelm your brain with a plethora of words we couldn't bring ourselves to proceed further. You see, it is not our sole concern to speak at great length and then take our leave; rather, we want to gauge the instruction in the sermon by your ability so that you may reap some benefit from what is said and then all go off home.³

(3) So, come now, let us add the remainder to what has been said, and see what the loving God proceeded to address to the patriarch after the command about circumcision. "God said to Abraham," the text goes on, "'Sarah your wife will not be called Sarah; instead, Sarrah will be her name.'" As in your case, he is saying, I indicated by adding a syllable that you would be father of many nations, so likewise also I am adding a letter to Sarah, for you to learn that now the time has come for the promises made of old by me to come into effect.⁴ "'Sarrah will be her name,'" the text says, remember. "'Now, I shall bless her, and I shall give you a child by her; he will become a nation, and kings of nations will spring from him.'"⁵ My reason for previously making the addition of a syllable was for you to learn that my words would be completely realized. Instead of being despondent by having in mind the limitations of nature, have regard for the greatness of my power and trust in what has been said by me. "'I shall bless her, and I shall give you a child by her; he will become

2. A précis of Gen 17.11–14, approximating more closely this time in one detail to the LXX text.

3. As we have noted frequently before (see Introduction (11) and (12) in FOTC 74), Chrysostom was often in danger of testing the patience of his congregation, to judge from his own admissions and the increasing length of the homilies. He preferred to have his congregation going home to discuss and ruminate on the day's theme.

4. Once again Chrysostom's exegetical instincts lead him to see great significance in this morphological item—and again without sound linguistic support. De Montfaucon notes that the change in the Hebrew feminine ending from *Sarai* to *Sarah* is represented by the Greek translators by a double consonant in *Sarrah*—nothing more.

5. Gen 17.16. The Greek translators have applied the second half of this verse to Isaac instead of Sarah.

several nations, and kings of nations will spring from him.'” The promises exceeded human nature; it was like promising to make people out of stones. After all, they were no different from stones as far as childbearing was concerned: the patriarch by this stage was impotent through old age and without the capacity to have children, and Sarrah in addition to her sterility had the extra handicap of extreme old age.⁶

(4) The just man, however, upon hearing this, thought that the promise made of old by God had been fulfilled in Ishmael. You see, when God said, “‘To you and your descendants I will give this land,’” without making clear that it was about [370] the child born of Sarrah that he was speaking, Abraham thought within himself that the fulfillment of the promise had already occurred. But now, hearing the Lord God saying, “‘I shall bless Sarrah, and I shall give you a child by her, and he will become several nations,’” and again, “‘kings of nations will spring from him,’” he had nothing to say—after all, he couldn’t fail to believe the words spoken by God, being the godly man he was. So, having regard to his own old age and Sarrah’s sterility that had lasted to her old age, and being at a loss and in a quandary about God’s promise, “he fell on his face and laughed,”⁷ Scripture says.

(5) He saw the extraordinary scope of the promise, and considering the greatness of the power of the one making it “he fell on his face and laughed,” that is, he was overjoyed. His mind was entertaining thoughts of how, by human logic, this could never happen, and whether a child could be born to a man of a hundred, and whether a sterile woman who had continued childless into her nineties could all of a sudden be awakened to fertility. Though entertaining these thoughts in his mind, he did not presume to utter the like in speech, but to show his gratitude he referred to the comfort found in Ishmael as if to say, Lord, you have sufficiently consoled me

6. De Montfaucon gravely remarks that Chrysostom is stretching the comparison with stones; he concedes Sarah’s condition but points out that Abraham later had other children—which goes to show that later editors are not always more critically minded than early commentators.

7. Gen 17.17.

and changed into joy my disappointment at being childless by the gift of Ishmael. I mean, once that child was born, I no longer had any idea or ever imagined I would have a child by Sarrah, nor did she expect it; that was the reason why she gave Hagar into my arms, giving up all hope on her own account. Consequently we both had sufficient consolation with the birth of Ishmael. Let this child, therefore, given us at your hands, live in your sight,⁸ and we will have sufficient comfort, and his life will console our old age.

(6) So what was the response of the loving Lord? Since he had sufficiently tested the godliness of the just man's attitude through the passage of time, and Sarrah's faith as well, and saw that both had no expectations, the one on account of old age and the other on account of sterility and advanced years, he said, This now seems to you to be quite impossible. In fact, my reason for being responsible for such a long delay was to show you that the gift given by me is beyond the possibilities of human nature, and for you and everyone else to learn through the events themselves that I am the Lord of nature, that it responds to my wishes and yields to my commands. After all, if I created it from being nothing, much more, now that it exists, can I correct its impediments. Accordingly, so that you may be able to have confidence, listen, bestir yourself, banish the thought rising in your mind, receive sufficient certitude from what I say. Behold, in fact, Sarrah your wife, whom you judge incapable any longer of having children owing to both sterility and old age—she will bear you a son. For you to have no doubt about this, lo, I foretell to you as well the name of the child that will be born: you will call the child Isaac. "I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant and with his descendants after him."⁹ You see, he is the one I promised you from the very outset, and in him the fulfillment of my promise will be achieved. Hence I am foretelling everything to you, not only that she will have a child, [371] but the name you will give him and the fact that I will establish my covenant with him, and not only that, but "with his descendants after him."

8. Cf. Gen 17.18.

9. Gen 17.19.

(7) Then the Lord, ever generous with his gifts and surpassing by far our requests, since he had uplifted the just man's spirits and had, you might say, turned an old man into a young one by his promises, and had by his words breathed new life into a corpse, so to speak, now lavished further blessings on him in these words: What I promised I will put into effect, and I accept as well your prayer about Ishmael.¹⁰ You see, I have heeded your petition, "'and I have blessed him. I will make him numerous and increase his numbers over and over. He will father twelve nations, and I will make him grow into a mighty nation.'" ¹¹ Since, you see (he is saying), he is your offspring, I will make him numerous to that extent and increase his numbers exceedingly so that twelve nations will spring from him.

(8) "'Nevertheless, my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarrah will bear you by this time next year.'" ¹² See in this case, I ask you, dearly beloved, how in one brief moment the just man gained the rewards of a lifetime, and that saying of Christ to his disciples was fulfilled, "Whoever has left father or mother, house or brothers, for my name, will receive a hundredfold here and will inherit eternal life."¹³ Consider, I ask you, this just man: he promptly obeyed the Lord's command, left his fatherland and preferred a foreign country to his native country; he gradually gave evidence of sustained endurance, and having reached the summit of virtue he became so conspicuously the object of attention of all eyes that those born from him were compared with the multitude of the stars.

(9) Perhaps if someone wanted to understand this in a proper sense, what this just man received here would be merely not a hundredfold, but even a thousandfold. If, however, he had been granted so much, what language could succeed in expressing his enjoyment in the next life? As far as possible, however, our sermon will still manage to demon-

10. Chrysostom's editors find the text at this point, Chrysostom's paraphrase of v. 20a, uncertain.

11. Gen 17.20.

12. Gen 17.21.

13. Cf. Matt 19.29.

strate it. You see, when you hear that all the just from that time until now, and up to the very end, make it the object of their prayer to be carried into the bosom of the patriarch, what greater honor than this could you propose? Do you see what endurance means, how great a thing virtue is, and how great it is to love God and to give evidence of deep gratitude for the Lord's kindnesses? I mean, since he contributed what he could at the appropriate time and received everything gratefully, both favorable and unfavorable, accordingly the loving God granted him this also as the very summit of all good things and the particular object of the just man's virtue for twenty-four years: when he left Charran in response to the Lord's command he was seventy-five, Scripture says, whereas now when he heard this he was in his hundredth year.

(10) Hearing this, dearly beloved, let us learn to give evidence of great endurance and never grow uneasy or faint-hearted by the fact of the effort virtue involves, but rather realize that our Lord, generous and munificent as he is, returns us lavish rewards for meager efforts; he not only lays up imperishable blessings in the future but also supports the weakness of our nature in the present life by lavishing many gifts upon us. This can be seen to be true from the patriarch's enduring not a few [372] hardships lest our weakness give way to pressure, but rather he comes in person to offer ready support, strengthening our enthusiasm and enlivening our reason. Nor does he leave us in perpetual ease lest we become more indifferent and thus drift into wickedness. Human nature, after all, when it finds itself in complete relaxation, forgets its nobility and no longer respects its proper limits; consequently, like a loving father he sometimes gives respite, sometimes checks us, so as in this way to prescribe for our soul's health.

(11) A physician, too, in treating a patient does not invariably confine him to abstinence nor invariably allow him to enjoy food without a care in the world, in case gluttony gives rise to fever and aggravates the complaint or energy is exhausted by constant fasting and the patient is made weaker;

instead, by carefully estimating the patient's strength and carefully employing his skill he marshals his resources. In exactly the same way the loving God, when he sees what befalls each of us, sometimes permits us to enjoy ease, sometimes puts us through our paces by way of trials. If in fact some people are more virtuous and prove to be more conspicuous with the onset of trials, they will win greater favor from on high; if, like us, they are in fact sinners, and yet by thus welcoming the onset of trials, they gratefully lose the heavy load of sins, they too in turn will enjoy generous pardon.

(12) Hence I beg you, aware as we are of the inventive wisdom of the physician of our souls, let us never pry into his dealings. I mean, even if our mind does not succeed in grasping these things, let us on this account rather marvel at God's wise provisions and praise him above all for the fact that we have such a Lord whose designs neither our mind nor the reasoning of human nature can do justice to. After all, we do not know what is for our benefit as well as he understands it; we do not have as great a concern for ourselves as he cares for our salvation, moving might and main so as to lead us to virtue and snatch us from the hands of the devil. When he sees us unable to profit from good times, like a skillful physician noting his patients becoming obese through gluttony and bringing them to health through dieting, in exactly the same way the wonderful physician of our souls allows us gradually through the onset of trials to encounter a sense of the harm we sustained from prosperity. When he sees the complete restoration of health, then it is that through his own assistance he grants us release from trials and gives evidence of providence on his part in generous measure.

(13) If, therefore, on the one hand, people of virtue encounter trials, let them not panic but all the more on that account buoy themselves up in the sound hope that the onset of trials will prove for them grounds for reward and commendation. If, on the other hand, people living in sin fall into trouble, let them likewise not get upset, knowing as they do that the experience of this will in good time prove the purifying of their sins, when we accept all that befalls us with

gratitude. This, after all, is the mark of a grateful servant, not simply to be grateful to his master [373] when he enjoys peace, but also to give evidence of the same gratitude in difficult situations. This, you see, was the way the patriarch distinguished himself, finding much confidence with God, and by vanquishing human nature he was rewarded with gifts.

(14) It is necessary once more, however, to return to the theme of our sermon,¹⁴ and to see the just man's obedience and the way he put into effect the directions from God without looking for an explanation or seeking reasons, unlike many silly people who pry into God's dealings, saying, What's the point of this? What's the point of that? What value comes from this or that? Not so the just man; instead, like a dutiful servant he made it his concern to put into effect without question whatever he was commanded. To learn this, listen to what follows: when the Lord had made the promise to him and finished his remarks, at once the just man carried out the order and marked on Ishmael the sign ordered by God—I mean circumcision—and all his household and acquired slaves,¹⁵ as God had told him. Now, he too was circumcised; "He was ninety-nine when he was circumcised in the skin of his foreflesh, while Ishmael was thirteen."¹⁶ Don't think it was without purpose that Scripture indicated to us his age; instead, it was for you to learn from the just man's obedience in meekly submitting to pain despite his extreme old age on account of God's command, and not only he but also Ishmael and all the servants—that was the reason for giving the ages.

(15) You see, dearly beloved, it is no slight thing to cut away healthy skin as though it were morbid. I know, of course, that surgeons amputate a gangrenous limb, but the pain in that case is not the same: then it's dead, so to speak, and they amputate something deprived of vital power. In our story, however, an old man advanced in years (he was, in fact, a

14. Chrysostom seems to get second wind here, after appearing to move to a conclusion beforehand by way of his normal moral exhortation. Evidently he has not yet said all he wants to say on the question of circumcision and its comparison with baptism, so a few more verses are commented on.

15. Cf. Gen 17.26–27.

16. Gen 17.24–25.

hundred, remember) meekly submitted to pain, at once being anxious to carry out God's command and also rendering his son and all his servants more zealous to avoid delay and with all haste to discharge the command from God. Do you see what a wonderful thing a man of virtue is, how he instructs all his servants as well to follow in his footsteps? In other words, what I said yesterday I repeat today, that the command came from God at that time so that the children would undergo this process in early years and so have no experience of pain from submitting to the removal of skin while yet insensitive.

(16) Consider, on the other hand, I ask you, dearly beloved, God's loving kindness and his unspeakable kindness to us. In that case pain and distress resulted from the action, and no benefit came from circumcision, except simply making people recognizable through this sign and separating them from the other peoples. Our circumcision, on the contrary—I mean the grace of baptism—involves a physic free from pain and is the means of countless good things for us, filling us with the grace of the Spirit; it has no limited span as in that other case, but rather in early years, in middle age and in the very height of old age can a person receive this circumcision not the work of human hands,¹⁷ which involves not simply endurance but laying aside sin's burden and [374] finding pardon for the faults of all time. You see, when the loving God saw the extraordinary degree of our limitations and the fact that we are suffering from incurable diseases and need a lot of care as well as his ineffable love, he is in his provision for our salvation granted us the renewal that comes from the bath of rebirth, so that by setting aside the former person—that is, evil deeds—and putting on the new we may advance along the way of virtue.

(17) I beseech you, however, let us not be worse than the ungrateful, unresponsive Jews;¹⁸ they, for their part, by receiving this sign of circumcision, had sufficient caution against

17. Cf. Col 2.11.

18. Cf. Homily 39, n. 33, on the degree of Chrysostom's antisemitism in the Genesis homilies.

mingling any further with other peoples on the basis of commerce, whereas, being the ungrateful lot they were, they even surpassed them in impiety. Let us, on the contrary, having once received circumcision through baptism, manage our own conduct with caution. I am not warning against our mingling with other peoples, but recommending that we adhere to our own ways of virtue and when mingling with them we attract them to religion, and through a life of good works we may become the occasion of instruction for them. The reason, after all, that the common Lord of all permitted good people and wicked to mingle together, the religious and the irreligious, was that the evil might profit from the good and those still imprisoned in impiety might be guided to religion. Nothing, you see, is so anxiously sought by God as the soul's salvation. Accordingly, let us not neglect it, I beseech you, neither our own nor our neighbors'; our own, by managing our affairs in the way pleasing to God; our neighbors', by being so conspicuous that without our saying a word those espying us may have sufficient instruction.


(18) As, therefore, by being virtuous we both gain the greatest advantage ourselves and also benefit non-believers, likewise, should we be indifferent,¹⁹ we will incur heavy punishment ourselves and prove a cause of scandal to others. I mean, just as those who practice virtue gain a double reward from God, for practicing it and also for attracting the neighbor to a like practice of it, in just the same way with evil we are punished not merely for what we have committed, but also for matters in which we have scandalized others. But God forbid that this sort of thing should happen to anyone attending here; let us all direct our own life to the edification of those who see us so that we may be able with confidence to stand before the judgment seat of Christ and be found worthy of those ineffable blessings which it may be the good for-

19. Again Chrysostom's frequent moral correlatives *rhathumia*, "indifference," "neglect," and careful attention. See Introduction (13) and (17) in FOTC 74.

tune of all of us to attain, thanks to the grace and loving kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, power and honor, now and forever, for ages of ages. Amen.

HOMILY 41

"Now, God appeared to Abraham at the Oak of Mambre as he was sitting at the door of his tent at midday."¹

ODAY [374] I SHRINK BACK in distaste from unfolding the teaching. I mean, I have in mind the fact that day in day out we are dinning in the message, exhorting you, laying before you this spiritual meal, while many of those who attend here and share in this spiritual teaching and awesome [375] repast waste their time at the races² and have profited nothing from our zeal. Instead, as though slaves to habit, at a mere nod from the devil they rush off in a trance to those illicit spectacles and fall willingly into the evil demon's snares, neither our urging nor the experience itself proving of any avail to instruct them. So what kind of enthusiasm can we now bring to the task of instructing men bent on gaining nothing from what we say? Don't be surprised at that: when a farmer likewise sees the soil unproductive despite great effort and hardship and yielding a reward not worth the effort, he becomes more reluctant about sowing and does not continue his farming with the same eagerness. A physician, too, when he sees the patient not following his directions and the ailment on the contrary growing worse day by day, frequently allows the patient to continue in the ailment so that the experience itself may prove a lesson for him of what is to his advantage. Likewise those who give lessons to children, when they see them rejecting the elements and discarding the memory of what has already been given them,

1. Gen 18.1.

2. This, of course, is not the first time that Chrysostom departs from his theme to scourge his congregation for attending the races—a practice that involved more than placing bets, it seems. See Homily 6, and my “horses.”

frequently abandon the task of correcting their indifference and of leading them to greater zeal.

(2) In the case of the farmer, however, it is probable that he frequently becomes less enthusiastic on realizing that he sustains a loss when undergoing effort and expense while being deprived of a harvest. The physician not unreasonably abandons his patient in many cases; it is the body, after all, that is the object of care, and he leaves it alone so that the extremity of pain may cause the patient to arrive at some sense of the ailment and thus accept the cure. The teacher of children on account of their immaturity in many cases chastises the children to good purpose. Surpassing all those, however, we take steps to give evidence of fatherly affection towards the wayward and teach them that if they persist in the same indifference, this itself will prove grounds for heavier condemnation for them. You see, whereas the farmer sows the seed without the same enthusiasm when considering that expense has already been incurred idly and to no purpose, we, on the contrary, are free from this problem. I mean, we sow this spiritual seed, and even if we reap no harvest on account of the indifference of the listeners, our reward will be complete. You see, we have spent money that is borrowed, carrying out the command of the Lord; later an account is due from the listeners with him who will be looking for what has been spent plus interest. Our object, however, is not that we avoid loss and recover our investment; instead, we intend that you too make a great profit from what is invested and so avoid becoming liable to that awful punishment suffered by the man who buried the talent and, far from multiplying his master's money, even hid it in the ground.³ This is what people are like who receive the word of our teaching (this, after all, being the meaning of the talent and money), without betraying a concern for showing any result or making a great profit. But perhaps someone may say this parable concerns the teachers. I agree. But if we approach it precisely, you will realize that whereas the teachers [376] are in fact responsible

3. Cf. Matt 25:14-30.

only for the expense, you on the contrary are responsible not only for what has been spent on you but also for the profit.

(3) To learn this, we must bring the parable to your attention. "A certain householder going abroad," the text says, "summoned his servants and gave them some talents, to one five talents, to another two, to another one. Now, after a while he returned and his servants came to him. The one who had received five talents approached him with the words, 'Master, you gave me five talents; but, behold, I have gained five talents in addition to them!'"⁴ Deep the gratitude of the servant, lavish the loving kindness of the master. What in fact did he say? "'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful in a few things, I will put you in possession of many. Enter into the delights of your master.'"⁵ Since you have shown deep gratitude, he is saying, in what has already been entrusted to you, you are deserving of even greater things being confided to you. "Now, the one who had received the two talents approached him in the words, 'Did you not hand over to me two talents? But, behold, I have gained two talents in addition to them.'"⁶ Very proper this man's disposition, too, in regard to his master's money, and accordingly he is given the same reward as the previous man. Why is it that the man who produced two talents was accorded the same commendation as the one who delivered five? Rightly so; it was not the zeal of the latter nor the indifference of the former that caused the greater or less profit but the rates of the borrowers. Surely the display of zeal by the one and the other can be paralleled; consequently they enjoyed the same reward.

(4) The third servant, however, did not behave in the same way. Instead, what? He approached him with these words: "'I knew you are a demanding person, harvesting where you haven't sown, reaping where you haven't scattered; so taking fright I went off and hid the talent in the ground. Behold,

4. Matt 25.14-15, 19-20, slightly paraphrased.

5. Matt 25.21.

6. Matt 25.22, in a variant of Chrysostom's own.

you have back what is yours.'"⁷ O, what wickedness of a servant! O, what extreme ingratitude, not only in doing nothing with the talent given him, but also in laying charges in return for the talent! This, you see, is what evil is like: it dulls the intellect and causes the person who has once strayed from the straight and narrow to fall down the precipice. Now, all this is said with reference to teachers lest they hide what has been entrusted to them instead of passing it on with all zeal to their disciples. But take heed now, dearly beloved, from the anger directed at this servant how the disciples also become responsible: not only is the money outlaid due but they are subject as well to an accounting with interest. So what does the master say to him? "'Wicked servant.'" Fearful anger, threats sufficient to strike terror. "'If you knew,'" he says, "'that I harvest where I haven't sown and reap where I haven't scattered, you should have lent the money to the bankers, and on my return I could have looked for it with interest,'"⁸ meaning by money his precious words and calling you, the recipients, bankers. It was your task only to lend, he says, whereas it is for me to reclaim it from them, not simply what was lent but the interest on it as well. See, dearly beloved, how great a dread these words inspire. What then could they reply who had evinced neglect even in watching over what was lent them when they were required as well to declare interest on it?

(5) See the Lord's loving kindness. In the case of material wealth, on the one hand, he forbids our taking interest. Why, and for what reason? Because both parties suffer great harm from it. You see, whereas [377] the poverty of one party is aggravated, the creditor by contrast heaps up for himself a multitude of sins along with the surplus of his wealth. Hence from the very beginning he laid down this law on the Jews with their rather materialistic mentality, namely, "You shall not lend money with interest to your brother or your neighbor."⁹ So what sort of excuse could they claim who prove even more savage than the Jews, and who, despite the Lord's favor

7. Matt 25.24-25.

8. Matt 25.26-27.

9. Deut 23.19, with the addition of "neighbor" on Chrysostom's part, perhaps to strengthen his point.

and wonderful love, are found to be inferior to those under the Law and in fact even worse? In spiritual things, to be sure, he himself promises he will look for interest. Why? Because this spiritual interest is the opposite of material wealth. You see, in the former case the debtor is brought suddenly to extreme penury, whereas in this case, whenever the debtor gives evidence of deep gratitude, he enjoys more generous reward from above the more interest he pays. Accordingly let each of you, dearly beloved, when we lend to you on credit, feel the need to give evidence of double effort and vigilance, for one thing guarding what has been lent so that it may remain untouched, for another thing working to share it with others and guide many along the path of virtue, so that your profit in turn may be doubled to the advantage both of your own salvation and of the salvation of those others. If in fact you do this, you will render us happy ("Happy is he who speaks to listening ears,"¹⁰ Scripture says, remember), and you will cause this spiritual banquet to be laid more generously for you.

(6) Do not neglect your brethren, therefore, nor consider only your own concerns; instead, let each of you be anxious to snatch your neighbor from the jaws of the devil and those illicit spectacles, and lead him to church, showing him in all restraint and gentleness both the extreme risk of harm and also the extent of the good things to be gained here. Do this not merely once or twice but ceaselessly. I mean, even if today he doesn't heed your words, he will heed them in future; if not in future, in due course seeing your insistence he will perhaps feel ashamed, will come to respect your care for him and desist from those harmful pursuits. Never say, Once, twice, three times, again and again I told him and got nowhere. Don't stop telling him; the more you persist, the more your reward will be increased as well. Don't you see how much long-suffering we enjoy from the God of all, and how

10. This is proving a very lengthy introduction to the day's homily, including that lengthy elaboration of the parable of the talents, all to make the point of responsive listening (perhaps, in the manner of preachers the world over, berating those present for the sins of the absent).

day after day we fail to heed his commands without his desisting from caring for us but rather supplying us with everything, making the sun to rise, giving us rain from heaven and everything else? Let us, in exactly the same way, take great pains in regard to our brethren and take issue with that evil demon so as to render his wiles ineffectual. After all, if everyone attending here managed to gain one person, consider how much the Church would receive great satisfaction in the vast numbers of its children and the devil would be dismayed to see his net cast idly and to no purpose. If in fact you do this, you too will hear on that dread day, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful in a few things, I will put you in possession of many."

(7) We are quite convinced, however, that you will do this: I see your faces and presume that you receive advice from us with [378] pleasure, and hence I hope that you in turn will do what lies in you. Consequently, let us bring our exhortation on this matter to a close at this point; on the other hand, we will spread before you our poor and meager table so that you may enjoy the accustomed instruction and thus go off home. It is necessary today, too, you see, to draw to your attention the patriarch Abraham so that you may learn what reward he received from God for his hospitality. "Now, God appeared to him," the text goes on, "at the Oak of Mambre as he was sitting at the door of his tent at midday." Let us examine each of the words with precision,¹¹ open up the treasure and disclose all the wealth concealed there. "Now, God appeared to him," the text says. Why did it begin in that way, "Now, God appeared to him"? See the Lord's loving kindness and consider, I ask you, a servant's gratitude. I mean, when God appeared to him previously and gave him the command about circumcision along with all the others, this remarkable man without fail hastened to put the orders from God into effect and without hesitating in the slightest he himself was

11. Once again Chrysostom's typical concern for the precision of Scripture emerges, based on his Antiochene theology of the Word incarnate in the inspired text and leading him to seize on each of its elements. See Introduction (21) in FOTC 74, and my articles, "Incarnation" and "*Akribeia*."

circumcised to discharge God's command, he circumcised Ishmael and all the slaves, demonstrating his complete obedience. So God appeared to him again. This, you see, is what our Lord is like: when he sees people grateful in the first instance, he lavishes further kindnesses on them and never desists from rewarding the gratitude of those obedient to him.

(8) This, then, was the reason why he appeared to him again, Scripture says, because he was obedient. So on this account blessed Moses began in this way, in the words, "Now, God appeared to him at the Oak of Mambre as he was sitting at the door of his house at midday." Notice, I ask you, in this instance the just man's virtue: "As he was sitting," the text says, "at his tent." He was putting hospitality into practice to such a degree as to be unwilling to entrust to anyone else in the household the task of attending to guests; instead, although he had three hundred and eighteen servants,¹² and was himself an old man, having attained advanced years (after all, he was a hundred years old), he took his seat at the door. In his case he was practicing this virtue; old age was no problem for him, he was not concerned for his own repose, nor was he reclining inside on his bed but was seated at the door. Other people, by contrast, in many cases not only do not show such concern but just the opposite, trying to avoid meeting visitors as if they were forced to receive them against their will.

(9) The just man, on the other hand, was not like that: he was sitting at the door of his tent at midday. This, you see, was the great extent of the just man's hospitality and the extraordinary degree of his virtue, the fact that he behaved like this at midday. Very properly, too: since he realized that people obliged to travel are in need of much service at that time particularly, accordingly he chose that time as suitable, seated himself and kept an eye out for passers-by without caring whether they were known to him or not. You see, it is not part of hospitality to worry about such things: friendliness

12. Cf. Gen 14.14.

involves sharing one's possessions with all comers. Since he cast a wide net of hospitality, he in turn was judged worthy to welcome the Lord of all with his angels. Hence Paul too said, "Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some people have entertained angels all unawares,"¹³ referring precisely to the patriarch. Hence Christ too said, "Whoever receives one of the least [379] of these in my name, receives me."¹⁴

(10) Let us take heed, dearly beloved, and when due to entertain visitors never be overly concerned as to who they are and where they come from. After all, had the patriarch been too concerned about this, he perhaps would have sinned. But he knew the dignity of the visitors, you say. Where does that emerge? On the contrary, had he known that, how would it have been a matter of remark? You see, his attention to hospitality would not have been so remarkable if he had been concerned about those things as in fact was the case when without knowing the identity of the visitors he approached them with such alacrity and respect, like a slave to his masters, as if ensnaring them with his words and entreating them not to decline and thus inflict on him the greatest loss. He knew, you see, what was to be done; hence it was with great ardor that he capitalized on the occasion.

(11) Let us listen, however, to the words of the writer himself,¹⁵ so that you may see his rejuvenated enthusiasm in the depths of old age and the old man himself rejuvenated as if made glad and convinced he had found a treasure in the coming of the visitors. "Now, he raised his eyes," the text goes on, "and looked and, lo, three men were standing in front of him. On seeing them he ran forward from the door of his tent to meet them."¹⁶ The old man runs and flies; you see, he

13. Heb 13.2.

14. Matt 18.5, with elements also of Matt 25.40, 45.

15. This is a unique reference by Chrysostom to Moses as "writer," *syngrapheus*, and almost without parallel in all his homilies on the Old Testament, where *prophētēs* is the usual term for the inspired authors from Moses to David. The distinction is significant for Chrysostom's theology of inspiration in that he clearly sees the Scriptures as God's inspired Word delivered primarily at the oral level. See my "terminology."

16. Gen 18.2.

had espied his prey, and making no account of his weakness he ran to snare it, not summoning his servants, not bidding a child, giving no evidence of indifference, but running of his own accord as if to say, Wonderful treasure, important business; by myself I should discharge this affair in case this advantage should pass me by. This is what the just man did, deciding to welcome these men, unknown travelers though they were.

(12) Let us discover and emulate the just man's virtue. If in fact we do so, it is likely that we, too, will have the good luck of such a wonderful catch; rather, we would always have that good luck if we wanted to. The loving Lord's intention, you see, was that we should not be indifferent about such friendship nor be too fastidious about our visitors—hence his words, "Whoever receives one of the least of these in my name receives me." So don't have regard to the station of the visitor nor despise him on the basis of what you can see, but consider that in him you are welcoming your Lord. You see, when in his name you give evidence of attention to the visitor, you will gain a reward just as if you welcomed him. So even if the person enjoying your friendliness is heedless and neglectful, make no account of it: you will receive a perfect reward for doing it out of regard for the Lord and imitating this particular virtue.

(13) "On seeing them," the text says, "he ran forward from the door of his tent to meet them." Very appropriately is the word "ran forward" used, so that you may learn that they arrived unknowing and did not come to the tent for a set purpose. Hence in case this spiritual advantage should escape him, this old man, this greybeard, this centenarian ran forward and by his running revealed his enthusiasm. "Espying them he bowed to the ground and said, 'Sir, if I have really found favor with you, do not pass by your servant. Let some water be brought, have your feet washed and rest under the tree; I will fetch some bread, you can eat and afterwards continue your journey when you have rested with your servant.'"¹⁷ Extraordinary the just man's [380] words, not for

17. Gen 18.3-5.

welcoming them—a wonderful example of enthusiasm—but for acting with such earnestness, without regard for his own age or the condition of his visitors (perhaps, in fact, they appeared to him to be young people), nor thinking that an appeal in word alone would suffice; “he bowed to the ground,” the text says, as if making supplication and addressing an earnest prayer to them lest it be thought his appeal was made merely perfunctorily. This is really the reason why Sacred Scripture reveals the just man’s virtue beyond telling in the words, “He bowed to the ground,” thus giving evidence by his posture and his words of his great ardor, his great humility, his intense spirit of hospitality, his ineffable care.

(14) “Bowing to the ground,” the text goes on, “he said, ‘Sir, if I have really found favor with you, do not pass by your servant.’” Who could do justice in words to this just man? How could anyone praise him even with countless lips? I mean, while the term “sir” is a customary one, on the other hand saying “‘if I have really found favor with you’” is unusual. You are giving a favor, he says, not receiving one. You see, this is what hospitality really involves: the person exemplifying it with enthusiasm receives something rather than gives it. Let no one hearing this, however, disparage the just man’s virtue nor think that he spoke these words in the knowledge of who the visitors were. It would have been, in fact, as has often been said, no great thing had he spoken these words from prior knowledge; but the really remarkable thing is that he spoke such words while approaching them as fellow human beings.

(15) Now, don’t be surprised at the fact that, whereas there were three visitors being welcomed, the just man addressed his plea to one in the word, “‘Sir.’” Perhaps in fact one of the visitors seemed the more logical one to whom the plea should be addressed. Then he went on and made his remarks applicable to them all: “‘Let some water be brought and have your feet washed’”; and again, “‘Rest under the tree, eat some bread, and afterwards continue your journey now that you have rested with your servant.’” Do you see how, without knowing who they were and speaking to the visitors as though

to fellow human beings, he makes his common plea to them all, calling himself more than once their servant? See how he suggests the poverty of his hospitality, instead of its extravagance. "Let some water be brought," he says, "have your feet washed, and rest under the tree." You see, since you are weary (he is saying) and have endured the burning heat, I beg you not to pass your servant by. After all, it is no great gesture being made by me, is it? I have only water to offer you for you to wash and rest from your great weariness under the tree. Then he mentions the kind of repast; Don't think I will offer you anything extravagant, a range of spices or variety of dishes; eat some bread, and then "continue your journey now that you have rested with your servant."

(16) Do you see how he employs various stratagems in his wish to importune the visitors, endeavoring to win them over by his posture, his words, and every means possible? First, you see, the text says, he bowed low, he called them "sirs" and himself "servant"; then he told them the kind of service he would be rendering them, minimizing it and showing it was nothing extraordinary: Only water, he says, (something available to everyone) I have to offer you for your feet, bread, and the shade of the tree. Do not scorn my tent, [381] do not despise my old age, do not reject my plea. I know how much hardship you have endured, I can imagine the intensity of the heat, so I want to offer you some little relief in this way. Could any loving father have shown such great kindness towards his child as this man showed to unknown strangers whose background was so far a mystery to him? Since, however, he made his approach with eagerness and great devotion, he attained his goal and succeeded in drawing the prey into his nets.

(17) "They said," the text goes on, "'We will do as you have said.'"¹⁸ The old man found new life and vigor: I have the treasure in my hands, he said, I have won riches, I have forgotten my age. See him quite heartened by the affair: as if

18. Gen 18.5b, where Chrysostom supplies a first person plural for the imperative "Do."

jumping for joy and holding countless good things in his hands, he was so happy. "Abraham made all haste into the tent,"¹⁹ the text goes on. Just as when he was pressing upon his quarry Sacred Scripture referred to his dedication and enthusiasm, so now that he saw the men and achieved the object of his desire his enthusiasm did not cease; instead, he then gave evidence of more ardent love and, though he had reached certainty, he did not then become less interested. That often happens with us: in the beginning we sometimes give evidence of great zeal but, once we make some progress in the affair, we don't bring the same enthusiasm to the task.

(18) Not so the just man, however; instead, what? Once more the old man sets to, presses on with the task and runs into the tent to Sarrah, "and says to her, 'Hurry, mix three measures of finest flour.'" Consider how he makes Sarrah as well a sharer in the quarry and how he taught her to imitate his virtue: he urges her on, too, to perform the task without indifference—rather, "'Hurry,'" he says.²⁰ What great good fortune has come our way, let us not lose the treasure; instead, "'Hurry, mix three measures of finest flour.'" You see, since he realized the importance of the action, he wanted to make the woman who shared his life a sharer also in receiving reward and recompense. Why, after all, tell me, did he give this direction to none of his servants but to his aged wife instead? Sarrah, far from declining the request, shows exactly the same enthusiasm. Let men take note, let women take note: men, on the one hand, to instruct their partners, when they have the prospect of some spiritual advantage, not to have the task carried out by servants but to see to it all personally; women, on the other hand, to be sharers with their husbands in such wonderful exploits and not to shrink from hospitality and attention to visitors but rather to imitate old Sarrah, who was prepared in old age to take pains and perform the tasks of menials.

19. Gen 18.6.

20. For Chrysostom, Abraham, like the other major characters of primeval and patriarchal history, is a moral figure conspicuous for that cardinal virtue, *prothumia*, "enthusiasm," as opposed to the capital sin of *rhathumia*, "indifference." See Introduction (17) in FOTC 74.

(19) I realize, however, that no one accepts what I am saying. These days, of course, everyone is anxious to take the opposite course to her: women are given to great decadence, interest in the condition of their clothes, gold ornaments, necklaces and cosmetics, with no attention given to their souls. Not even Paul's cries move them: "not in braided hair, gold, pearls or expensive clothing."²¹ See this soul reaching up to heaven, how he thought it not shameful for him to take [382] his sermon to such a fine point as to preach about braided hair. And rightly so; after all, his complete attention was given to care for the soul. So since he realized that these things in particular contribute to the soul's ruin, he shirked nothing calculated to instruct people suffering from these vices; instead he said, If you insist on adorning yourself, adorn yourself with true adornment, the kind that befits religious women: adorn yourself with good works. This is the soul's adornment, this is subject to no condemnation by outsiders, no one will be able to rob you of it, it remains proof against theft forever. You see, from external adornment countless evils take their rise; I am not yet referring to damage to the soul, false airs stemming from that, scorn for one's neighbors, mental aberration, ruin of the soul, and a host of improper pleasures, but the fact that this sort of adornment is vulnerable to the mischief of servants, assault by robbers, wiles of flatterers, and you could list countless evils and persistent problems arising from it.

(20) Sarrah, however, was not like that; instead, she made use of true adornment. Hence she was worthy of the patriarch, and just as he made haste to run into the tent, she too carried out the direction with promptness and mixed three measures of finest flour. You see, since there were three visitors, he ordered three measures to be mixed so that the bread would be ready sooner. After giving this direction he in turn ran to the cattle. What youthful vigor in an old man! What devotion of soul! He runs to the cattle, not letting any of the servants go, showing the visitors in every way how much sat-

21. 1 Tim 2.9.

isfaction he enjoyed and how great an honor he considered their visit to be, as well as his judgment that the occasion was a treasure for him. "He took a fine tender heifer," the text says. He made the selection himself, choosing the best of them and giving it to his servant, and pressing him not to hesitate but to show all speed. Consider how everything is done with haste, with lively enthusiasm, with relish, with joy, with deep satisfaction. "The servant hastened to do it," the text adds. Nor did the old man rest at that, but once more pressed on with his role of service. "Taking curds and milk and the heifer he had prepared, he set it before them."²² He personally saw to the preparation and the serving; and instead of judging himself fit to recline with them, he took his own position under the tree while they were eating.

(21) What a wonderful extent of hospitality! What an extraordinary degree of humility! What a remarkable example of godly attitude! This hundred year old person stands nearby while they are eating. In my opinion, under the impulse of keen desire and enthusiasm he had at that time been rendered safe from weakness and had gained some additional strength. You see, it often happens that when enthusiasm of spirit is heightened, it overcomes bodily weakness. Accordingly the patriarch stands like a servant nearby, considering it a great honor to be judged worthy to serve the visitors and give them relief from the weariness of their traveling. Do you see how great was the just man's hospitality? I mean, don't concentrate on the fact that he served them bread and meat, but consider with how much respect, how much humility he displayed his hospitality, unlike most people who, even should they do something similar, think themselves superior to the recipients and oftentimes despise them for the attention given them. This, however, is like the case of someone acquiring and amassing wealth and then throwing away all he has amassed. You see, the person who does something from a warped intention and acts as one giving rather than receiving does not know what he is doing; hence he loses the reward for it as well.

22. Gen 18.8.

(22) The just man, [383] on the contrary, knew what he was doing; through everything that happened, he revealed his enthusiasm of spirit. After he had with liberality and great cheerfulness sown the seed of hospitality, at once with generous hand he reaped the sheaves. You see, after he had done all that lay within him and, far from leaving anything undone, had brought the process of hospitality to completion, and thus the just man's virtue was made manifest, then it was that, with a view to the just man's knowing the extent of his good fortune and the number of good things of which his hospitality had proved the cause for him, the visitor revealed his identity and gradually made manifest to the just man the greatness of his power. Seeing him standing by the tree and betraying by his position his great respect and attention, the visitor said to him, "'Where is your wife Sarrah?'"²³ Immediately by this question he revealed to him that he was no casual visitor, since for one thing he knew his wife's name. He replied, "'See, in the tent there.'" Since, being God, he was now about to promise him something beyond the limits of nature, consequently by mentioning Sarrah's name he suggested that the one who had visited his tent was more than a human being.

(23) He said, in fact, "'When I return and visit you at this time next year, your wife Sarrah will have a son.'"²⁴ Behold the fruits of hospitality, behold the reward of heightened enthusiasm, behold the recompense of Sarrah's exertion. "Now, she was listening near the door of the tent, standing behind him. On hearing this, she laughed to herself and said, 'So far this hasn't yet happened to me, and my husband is an old man.'"²⁵ So as to offer an excuse for Sarrah, Sacred Scripture had previously indicated that "Abraham and Sarrah were advanced in years," and without stopping there it added further, "Now, Sarrah's periods had ceased to occur."²⁶ The spring had dried up, it is saying, the eye had lost its sight, the very workplace had been rendered useless. With this in mind,

23. Gen 18.9.

25. Gen 18.12.

24. Gen 18.10.

26. Gen 18.11.

therefore, Sarrah daily reflected on her own age and the patriarch's advanced years. But while she was thinking this in her tent, the one who understands the unspoken thoughts of the mind wished to show both the extraordinary degree of his power and the fact that none of our unspoken thoughts escapes his notice; so he said to Abraham, "'Why did Sarrah laugh and say to herself, Am I really to have a child, at my age?'"²⁷ This, in fact, was what she was thinking.

(24) "'Nothing is impossible for God, is it?'"²⁸ Lo, he revealed his identity openly! Do you know, he says, that being Lord of nature I can do everything I wish, bring life to an infertile womb and make it fit for childbearing? "Nothing is impossible for God, is it?" Do I not make everything and transform everything? Have I not power over life and death? "'Nothing is impossible for God, is it?'" Did I in fact not make this promise before? My word will take effect, will it not? So take heed that "'I will return to you at this time next year and Sarrah will have a son.'" When I return at this time, he says, then Sarrah will know by the way things turn out that neither age nor sterility will prove a difficulty for her; instead, my word will be inescapable, and the birth will teach her the power of my words. Then, on hearing that not even the thoughts passing through her mind [384] escaped the notice of the visitor, "she denied it, saying, 'I didn't laugh.'"²⁹ Fear, you see, had shaken her mind. Hence Scripture attributed it all to her weakness in saying, "For she was frightened." But the patriarch said to her, "'Not so: you did laugh.'"³⁰ Don't think, he says, even if you were entertaining these thoughts in your mind and having a private laugh, that you could escape the power of the visitor. So don't deny what has happened nor compound your sin. After all, wonderful blessings have come our way today, thanks to our hospitality.

27. Gen 18.13, Chrysostom omitting from his text reference to the speaker as Yahweh, significant for other commentators on the Hebrew and Greek texts.

28. Gen 18.14.

29. Gen 18.15.

30. Against the flow of the dialogue Chrysostom attributes the corrective to Abraham, perhaps to allow for moral elaboration, or reluctant to see the Lord involved in a wrangle.

(25) Let us all imitate this and display much zeal in practicing hospitality, not merely to receive some recompense for these perishable and corruptible things but to lay up for ourselves as well the enjoyment of immortal blessings. You see, if we practice hospitality, we shall welcome Christ here and he will, in turn, welcome us in those mansions prepared for those who love him, and we shall hear from him, “‘Come my Father’s blessed ones, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’”³¹ Why so? “‘For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger and you made me welcome; I was in custody and you came to see me.’”³² What could be less troublesome than this? He didn’t bid us scrutinize and investigate those about to be given hospitality by us, did he? You play your part, he says, even if the person is of lowly station and unprepossessing; I will take as done to myself what is done to them. Hence he added, “‘Whatever you did to one of the least of my brethren you did to me.’”³³

(26) So don’t spurn such wonderful profit accruing to you from hospitality, but day in and day out exert yourself to gain this fine merchandise, in the knowledge that our Lord looks for generosity of spirit, not great amounts of food, not a rich table but a cheerful attitude, not simply attention in words alone but also love from the heart and sincere mind. Hence a certain sage also said, “Likewise a kind word is more acceptable than a gift.”³⁴ In many cases, you see, attention in word has helped a needy person back on his feet more effectively than a gift. Aware of this, then, let us make no difficulty about meeting visitors; instead, if on the one hand we are in a position to alleviate their poverty, let us do so with love and cheerfulness, not as giving something but as gaining very great advantage. On the other hand, if we cannot do so, let us not be uncivil with them but at least offer them attention in word and respond to them with restraint. I mean, why

31. Matt 25:34.

33. Matt 25:40.

32. Matt 25:35.

34. Sir 18:16.

adopt an uncivil attitude towards him? He didn't pressure you, after all, did he? He didn't use force, did he? He asks, entreats, begs; but someone doing this doesn't deserve abuse. Why do I say asks and begs? He pours out countless requests, all for a single penny, and we slip him not even this much. What excuse would we have? What account could we give, we who each day spread a lavish table and often have more than we need, whereas with them we share not a scrap, even if by so doing we could win all these countless blessings?

(27) O, what awful indifference! I mean, what good comes from this? What great gain are we letting slip from our grasp? We are rejecting the basis of our salvation offered us by God, [385] without giving it so much as a thought or even considering the insignificance of our offering or the extraordinary degree of the wonderful rewards. Instead, we lock everything up in cupboards and allow the gold to be consumed by rust—or, rather, we thrust it into the hands of robbers. Our resplendent wardrobe, on the other hand, we allow to be eaten by moths, unable to bring ourselves to have the surplus properly disposed of so that it may be kept for us in the future and we may thus succeed in being accorded these ineffable blessings. May this be the good fortune of all of us, thanks to the grace and loving kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, power and honor, now and forever, for ages of ages. Amen.

HOMILY 42

*"Now, when the men rose, they looked directly at Sodom and Gomorrah."*¹



FROM [385] WHAT WAS READ YESTERDAY, dearly beloved, we learnt the extraordinary degree of the just man's hospitality. Today, too, let us move to what follows and come to discover the patriarch's love and compassion. You see, this good man possessed each of the virtues to an extraordinary degree: he was not only loving, hospitable and compassionate, but he gave evidence as well of all the other virtues in generous measure. If there is need for him to display endurance, you will find him reaching the very height of that virtue; if humility, you will see him in turn, far from yielding place to anyone, surpassing them all; if there is need for him to display faith, he will again be found in this conspicuous above all others. His soul, in fact, is like an animated image, revealing in itself a range of colors of virtue. So what excuse remains for us when, despite the example of one human being adorned with every virtue, we prove to be so bereft as to have no intention to practice any virtue? You see, for proof that our being bereft of all goods is a matter not of being unable, but of being unwilling, we have clear indication in the fact that we find many of our peers conspicuous for virtue. The very fact that the patriarch, who lived before the age of grace and before the Law, reached such a degree of virtue of himself from the knowledge innate in his nature is sufficient to deprive us of any excuse.

(2) Some people, however, will perhaps say that this man had the advantage of great care from God, and the God of all gave evidence of deep concern for him. Yes, I admit that;

1. Gen 18.16.

still, if he himself had not first given evidence of his own goodwill, he would not have enjoyed the Lord's help. So do not have eyes only for that, but each day study and learn how by first providing a sample of his own virtue in every circumstance, he was judged worthy of help.² More than once we pointed out to you, when he was making his move from his ancestral land how, far from receiving from his forebears the seeds of religion, he gave evidence from his very own disposition of his great godliness. Despite his being a recent refugee from Chaldea, he was suddenly called upon to choose a foreign land in exchange for his own, and without hesitation, without delay he immediately obeyed the command, and without knowing where his traveling would end he pressed on in haste in these uncertain matters as though they were clear, giving pride of place over everything else to the command from God.

(3) Do you see how from the very outset he exerted every effort of his own, and consequently he daily gained help from God as well, in very generous measure? In just the same way, let us, too, dearly beloved, if we want to enjoy favor from above, imitate the patriarch, and instead of drawing back from virtue let us embrace each and every virtue and practice it with such zeal as to win over that unsleeping eye to rewarding our effort. You see, he understands the unspoken thoughts of our mind, [386] and when he sees us giving evidence of a sound attitude and anxious to embrace the struggles of virtue, immediately he supplies us with assistance from himself, at the one time lightening our exertions, supporting the limitations of our nature and granting us generous rewards.

(4) At the Olympic Games you would not find anything like this happening. On the contrary, the trainer stands by, merely in the role of a spectator of the contestants, unable to contribute any help of his own, but merely waiting for victory to be declared. Our Lord, on the other hand, is not like that; instead, he becomes a contestant himself with us, offers us his

2. Had Chrysostom been living somewhat later in the West, statements such as these on the relation of human effort to divine grace might have earned him the charge of Semipelagianism.

hand, takes part in the struggle, and seemingly in every way hands over our adversary to us in defeat, striving might and main that we may prevail and wrest the victory, so that he may place on our head the unfading crown. Scripture says, remember, "You will receive a crown of graces upon your head."³ Whereas in these Olympic Games the crown after victory is nothing more than a laurel wreath, or applause, or acclamation of the crowd, all of which disappears and is lost with the coming of evening, the crown for virtue and its struggles has nothing material about it, it is not subject to decay in this world but is everlasting, immortal, enduring for all ages. Whereas the effort lasts only a short time, the reward for the effort has no end, is not affected by time and does not fade. To grasp this, behold how many ages and how many generations have passed since this patriarch lived: as though it were yesterday or today, the crown for his virtue is still so resplendent, and until the end of time he proves an occasion of instruction for all rightminded people.

(5) Since this just man's virtue is so wonderful, therefore, let us bestir ourselves to imitation of him, and at least at this late stage let us acknowledge our own nobility, emulate the patriarch, show some consideration of our salvation and display considerable concern not only to keep the body healthy but also to cure the various ills of the soul. In fact, provided we are ready to be awake and on the alert, we will more easily heal the ills affecting the body's passions. You see, no matter what passion disturbs us, as long as we are prepared to keep in mind the Judgment on that dread day by pious thinking and have regard not for present delight but the pain afflicting us afterwards, immediately it will take flight and depart from our soul. Let us therefore not be indifferent, but in the knowledge that it is a contest and struggle and there is need to be ready for battle let us each day keep our mind fresh and strong so that we may enjoy help from on high and succeed in crushing the head of that evil beast [387]—I mean the one who plots against our salvation. After all, the Lord

3. Prov 1.9.

himself has made us this promise: "Behold, I have given you power to walk on snakes and scorpions, and power over all the enemy's might."⁴

(6) Let us, therefore, I beseech you, take care to follow in the footsteps of this patriarch by practicing virtue and so be in a position to be awarded the same crown as his, to be transported into his bosom, to escape punishment in hell and to be judged worthy of those good things beyond all telling. But for the purpose of promoting in you greater zeal and bestirring you to imitation of this just man, come now, once more let us recount his story to you, dearly beloved, by picking up the thread of what follows. After that generous hospitality of his, remember, judged not by the quality or quantity of food but by his enthusiasm, he was immediately granted reward for his hospitality. Learning who the visitor was and how great his power, the patriarch accompanied them, the text goes on to say, as they were about to proceed to the overthrow of Sodom. See the Lord's loving kindness in employing so much considerateness by showing regard for the good man and wishing at the same time to reveal the virtue that was concealed in his soul. "Now, when the sun arose," the text says, "they looked directly at Sodom and Gomorrah." It is referring to the angels: whereas here in Abraham's tent both the angels and their Lord were seen at the same time, now like ministers they were sent about the overthrow of those cities while he stayed behind as if communing with the just man, like one friend to another, about what he was going to do.⁵

(7) Accordingly, when they departed, the text goes on, "The Lord said, 'I shall not conceal from my servant Abraham what I am going to do.'"⁶ Wonderful is God's considerateness and his regard for the good man surpassing all

4. Luke 10.19.

5. For some reason Chrysostom has omitted v. 16b in the Hebrew and LXX stating that, despite Chrysostom's picture of intimate colloquium, all three left the scene and even Abraham left with them.

6. Gen 18.17, as a statement, rather than the interrogative of the Hebrew and LXX.

reckoning. I mean, see how he converses with him, man to man, so to say, showing us how much regard the virtuous are accorded by God. Lest you think such great regard for the good man was a mark of God's goodness only, see how Sacred Scripture teaches us that he rendered himself deserving of such great regard for his obedience to God's commands with great responsiveness. You see, in saying, "I shall not conceal from my servant Abraham what I am going to do," he does not immediately say what is about to happen: the sequel shows him adding the words that he was about to set Sodom on fire. But even that should not be passed over; no syllable or particle of the contents of Sacred Scripture ought to be passed idly by.⁷ How great a regard do you think that very remark is an index of, "My servant Abraham"? How much affection? How kind a disposition? In fact, it demonstrates in particular the regard for the just man and his remarkable character.

(8) Then, as I have remarked, after saying, "I shall not conceal," he does not immediately go on to say what is happening—instead, what? For us to learn that it was not idly or to no purpose that he shows this care for him, he says, "Now, Abraham will become a great and populous nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed. I am aware, of course, that he will instruct his sons and his household after him, and they will keep the ways of the Lord God in practicing righteousness and sound judgment, so that the Lord will bring Abraham all the things he has promised him."⁸ Bless me, what a marvelous extent of the Lord's loving kindness! Since after this he was about to bring on the destruction [388] of Sodom, now in advance he encourages the patriarch by promising him the most marvelous blessing and the fact that he would become a great multitude, and at the same time teaching him that he would receive this reward

7. A classic statement of the position of Chrysostom and his school on the importance of the literal sense of Scripture and the *akribeia*, "precision," of the sacred text—all flowing from their conviction of biblical inspiration. See my *Inspiration*, pp. 128–49, and "Akribeia."

8. Gen 18.18–19.

for his godly attitude. I mean, consider how great was the patriarch's virtue when God says, "I am aware, of course, that he will instruct his sons after him, and they will keep the ways of the Lord." Great the degree of his virtue: he does not only receive reward for his own practice of virtue, but he is awarded generous recompense for the instruction he gave his children. And rightly so; after all, from then on he proved an instructor of everyone. You see, having provided a basis at the outset, he would have been responsible as well for those coming later.

(9) See also the Lord's goodness: not only does he reward him for his virtue in the past but also for the future. "I am aware," the text says, remember, "that he will instruct his sons." Since I know in advance the good man's attitude, he is saying, accordingly in advance I offer reward. You see, he knows the unspoken thoughts of our mind, and when he notices us forming proper intentions and giving evidence of a sound attitude, he offers us his hand and rewards us for our efforts, making us thereby more zealous. This you would find to be the case with all good people. After all, knowing the limitations of human nature, he frequently intervenes in our struggles to provide us with assistance and reward from himself lest we despair in the face of difficulties, and thus he lightens the effort and intensifies our purpose.

(10) "I am aware," he said, remember, "that he will instruct his sons, and they will keep the ways of the Lord." In saying, "he will not instruct," he is making a prediction not only about him but also about his sons, that "they will keep the ways of the Lord," referring to Isaac and Jacob. "The ways of the Lord," that is, his orders, his commands. "In practicing righteousness and sound judgment," he said, remember, to prefer nothing to goodness, to stay clear of all wrongdoing. This, you see, is the greatest virtue; this certainly was the reason that everything spoken of by the Lord to him would take effect. But I think he was referring to something else as well in saying, "Now, Abraham will become a great and populous nation," meaning, You for your part have chosen the way of virtue, you obey my commands and

give evidence of virtue, and so you will become a great and populous nation, whereas these wicked people inhabiting the region of Sodom will all be destroyed. You see, just as virtue proves the basis of salvation for those practicing it, likewise wickedness becomes the cause of destruction.

(11) Then, after he had encouraged the good man to greater confidence through his praise and commendation, he turned to his theme in these words: "The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah," he says. Admittedly other cities as well would be destroyed along with them, but since they were the most notorious he made mention of them. "It has come to me more and more, and their sins are exceedingly great."⁹ See the intensity of their evil deeds: the clamor is deafening, not only from the outcry but from their wickedness as well. I am inclined to think the phrase, "The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah has come more and more," means that in addition to that unspeakable iniquity, beyond all pardoning, they were giving evidence also of many other offenses, the powerful oppressing the weak, the rich the poor.

(12) So, not only [389] is the outcry very distressing, he says, but their sins as well, far from being light, are great—in fact, exceedingly great. I mean, they had devised novel forms of sinfulness, they had invented monstrous and illicit norms for intercourse, the frenzy of their wickedness was so powerful that all were infected with total defilement, and far from giving evidence any longer of good behavior they called for utter destruction. After all, their maladies had reached the incurable stage and were now proof against treatment. Then, to teach the whole human race that, even if their sins are exceedingly great and confessed to be such, he does not pronounce sentence before proof is manifest, he says, "I am going down to see if their deeds correspond to the outcry reaching me, so as to know if it is true or not." What is meant by the considerateness of the expression? "I am going down to see if their deeds correspond to the outcry reaching me, so as to know if it is true or not." What is meant by the

considerateness of the expression? “‘I am going down to see.’” I mean, does the God of all move from place to place? No indeed! It doesn’t mean this; instead, as I have often remarked, he wants to teach us by the concreteness of the expression that there is need to apply precision, and that sinners are not condemned on hearsay nor is sentence pronounced without proof.¹⁰

(13) Let us all take heed of this: it is not only those facing the tribunal who must respect the Law, but each of us ought never condemn our neighbor on mere slander. This is the reason, in fact, why later blessed Moses, inspired by the Spirit,¹¹ exhorts us in the words, “Don’t accept an idle report.”¹² And blessed Paul in his writings cries out, “But why do you judge your brother?”¹³ Christ instructed his disciples and taught the Jewish populace, the Scribes and the Pharisees in these words, “Do not judge, lest you be judged.”¹⁴ why are you, he asks, usurping the role of judge ahead of time? Why are you anticipating that dread day? Do you want to play the judge? Be one for yourself and your own faults—no one will stop you; in fact, in this way you will correct your own sins and sustain no harm from the exercise. But if you neglect your own case and sit in judgment on others, you will not be aware you are amassing a greater burden of sins for yourself.

(14) Hence, I beseech you, let us avoid altogether passing sentence on our neighbor. You see, even though you have no share in judicial authority and yet you still pass judgment in your mind, you have rendered yourself guilty of sin for ac-

10. As always, the anthropomorphisms of Scripture predictably—if we consider his first principles—concern Chrysostom and lead to a rehearsing of these principles. He wants his congregation to preserve that fine balance between divine transcendence and divine considerateness, of which latter the *pachutēs*, “concreteness,” of scriptural expression in anthropomorphisms is an example.

11. A frequent phrase in Chrysostom’s mouth, indicating his clear conviction of the inspiration of Scripture, even if his thinking on the manner in which the inspiration affects the biblical author is no more explicit than most other of the Fathers’. His term for “inspire” here, *enēchein*, obviously contains the elements of “echo”; it can mean “make resound.” See my “terminology.”

12. Exod 23.1 in the LXX.

13. Rom 14.10,

14. Matt 7.1.

cepting no proof and acting in many cases only on suspicion and mere slander. This, in fact, was the reason blessed David also cried out in the words, "The man who slanders his neighbor in secret I drove out."¹⁵ Do you see the extraordinary degree of virtue? Not only did he not entertain what was said but he also gave short shrift to the person bent on slandering his brother. So if we, too, want to reduce our own faults, we should be on our guard about this most of all, not to condemn our brothers nor to encourage those anxious to slander them, but rather to rebuff them as the inspired author¹⁶ recommended and utterly repel them. In fact, I am inclined to think this is what the inspired author Moses also was indicating in his words, "Don't accept an idle report."¹⁷

(15) Hence, of course, in the present case as well, the Lord of all employed such remarkable concreteness of expression with a view to the benefit of our souls in saying, "I am going down to see." Why, in fact? Didn't he know? Wasn't he aware of the magnitude of their sins? Hadn't he learnt of their [390] incorrigibility? Still, as if to offer some excuse to the people intending later shamelessly to make accusations, and as if to show their unrestrained behavior and great lack of virtue, he shows this remarkable longsuffering. Perhaps, however, it was not solely for that purpose but to provide the good man with the occasion of showing the compassion and affection of his attitude. So when the angels went off to Sodom, as I remarked before, the patriarch stood before the Lord.¹⁸ "Abraham approached him," the text goes on, "and said, 'Surely you won't destroy the good along with the impious, so that the good will be as the impious?'"¹⁹

(16) O, what great confidence on the just man's part—or, rather, his great compassion of spirit, overwhelmed as he was with a rush of compassion and not knowing what he was say-

15. Ps 101.5.

16. For Chrysostom, *prophētēs* can be applied to the Old Testament "inspired authors" David, Moses, the prophets—but not usually the historical writers (former prophets, in the terms of the Hebrew Bible).

17. Exod 23.1.

18. A paraphrase of Gen 18.22.

19. Gen 18.23.

ing. To show that he made this plea in great fear and trembling, Sacred Scripture says, "Abraham approached him and said, 'Surely you won't destroy the good along with the impious?'" What are you doing, blessed patriarch? Does the Lord require entreaty from you not to do this? Still, let us not think this way. You see, he doesn't say it to the Lord as if he were about to do it; instead, since he wasn't bold enough to speak directly on his nephew's behalf, he made a general entreaty for everyone out of a desire to save his life along with theirs and rescue them along with him.

(17) So he begins his entreaty in the words, "'Should there be fifty good people in the city, will you destroy them? Won't you spare the whole place on account of the fifty good people, should there be such there? Surely. You won't put this into effect, killing a good person along with an impious one, so that the good person will be the same as the impious. Surely not! Will not the one who sits in judgment on the whole world exercise judgment here?'"²⁰ See how even in his entreaty he betrays the godliness of his attitude in acknowledging God's judgment of the whole earth and imploring him not to destroy a good person along with an impious one. Then the gentle and loving God accedes to his request in the words, I will do as you say and heed your entreaty: "'If fifty good people can be found in the city, on their account I will spare the whole place.'"²¹ To the fifty good people, he is saying, if they can be found, I will grant the favor of the salvation of the others, and I will put your petition into effect.

(18) Let us see, however, how the good man becomes confident and in the knowledge of God's loving kindness presents a second request in the words, "'Now I have presumed to speak to my Lord, dust and ashes though I am.'"²² Don't think, Lord, he says, that I am unaware of my condition and am overstepping the mark in displaying such confidence: I know that I am dust and ashes, but in knowing that and realizing it clearly, I am also not unaware that the extent of your

20. Gen 18.24-25.

21. Gen 18.26.

22. Gen 18.27.

loving kindness is immense and that you are rich in goodness and wish all people to be saved. After all, how would the one who creates people from nothing ever destroy them once they are made unless the malice of their sins were great? Hence I must once more beg you, "If fewer than fifty can be found, and there are forty-five good people in the city, will you not save the city?" He replied, 'If forty five can be found, I will not destroy it.'"²³

(19) Who could worthily praise the God of all for his marvelous longsuffering and considerateness, or congratulate the good man for enjoying such great confidence? "He continued [391] to speak," the text goes on, "'But what if only forty can be found there?' He replied, 'For the sake of the forty I will not destroy it.'"²⁴ Then at that point the good man, while respecting God's ineffable longsuffering and being afraid of ever seeming to go too far and surpass the limit in his entreaty, said, "'Pardon me, Lord, if I continue to speak: if only thirty can be found there?'"²⁵ Since he saw he was disposed to kindness, he still did not proceed gradually with his compromise: he sought to rescue not merely five good people but ten in pursuing his request thus, "'If only thirty can be found there?' He replied, 'I will not destroy it if I find thirty there.'"
Consider the degree of the good man's persistence: as though he personally were due to be liable for sentence, he takes great pains to snatch the people of Sodom from the impending punishment. "He said, 'Since I am able to speak to the Lord, what if there are only twenty there?' He replied, 'For the sake of the twenty I will not destroy it.'"²⁶ O, the goodness of the Lord beyond all telling and all imagining! I mean, which of us living in the midst of countless evils could ever choose to exercise such wonderful considerateness and loving kindness in executing a sentence against our peers?

(20) Nevertheless, the good man saw the wealth of God's loving kindness, and instead of stopping there he spoke on: "'Pardon me, Lord, if I speak once again.'"²⁷ You see, since

23. Gen 18.28.

25. Gen 18.30.

27. Gen 18.32.

24. Gen 18.29.

26. Gen 18.31.

God's loving kindness was beyond telling, he was afraid he might move the one he was petitioning to indignation at him, and so he said, "'Pardon me, Lord,'" surely, I'm not doing something rash? I'm not giving evidence of shamelessness, am I? I'm not committing a deed deserving of condemnation in speaking still again, am I? In that great goodness of yours accept from me one further petition. "'But what if ten can be found there?' He replied, 'For the sake of the ten I will not destroy it.'" And since he had previously said, "'I will speak once again,'" the text goes on, "The Lord departed after he ceased speaking to Abraham, and Abraham returned to his own place.'" ²⁸

(21) Do you see the Lord's considerateness? Do you see the good man's affection? Did you gain an insight into the great power of those who practice virtue? If ten good people can be found, he says, remember, for their sake I will grant everyone forgiveness of their sins. Wasn't I right in saying that all this happened so that no basis for excuse would be left for those who later show no sense of shame? I mean, there are a lot of people who lack balance, whose tongue is out of control, who insist on making accusations in these words: Why was Sodom overthrown? If they had had the advantage of tolerance, perhaps they would have repented. Hence it shows you the gravity of their wickedness, that in the midst of such a large population there was such a dearth of virtue as called for a further deluge of the proportions that previously overwhelmed the world. Since, however, it is God's promise that never again would such a punishment be inflicted, ²⁹ accordingly he imposes a different kind of punishment by submitting them to punishment and at the same time providing a perpetual instruction for people coming later. That is to say, since they had overturned the laws of nature and had devised novel and illicit forms of intercourse, consequently he imposed a novel form of punishment, rendering sterile the womb of the earth on account of their lawlessness and leaving a perpetual reminder to later generations not to attempt the

28. Gen 18.33. .

29. Cf. Gen 8.21.

same crimes in case they encounter the same punishment. [392] If you want to, you can visit those places and see the land screaming aloud, so to speak, and revealing the traces of punishment, even after such a number of years, as though inflicted yesterday or the day before—so vivid are the signs of God's wrath. Hence, I beseech you, let us profit from the example of others being punished.

(22) Perhaps, however, someone may say, Why so? Although they were punished that way, are there not today as well a lot of people who break the same laws as they did without being punished? Yes, but this will be the means of bringing greater punishment on those committing such offenses. You see, whenever we fail to learn from what happened to them and gain nothing from God's longsuffering, consider how we are fanning the inextinguishable fire more savagely for ourselves and preparing a more biting worm.³⁰ From another point of view, however, there are a lot of people even today who, thanks to God's grace, are virtuous and able to appeal to the Lord, like the patriarch of those times; and even if we ourselves from a consideration of our own affairs and having regard to our own indifference consider there is a great dearth of virtue, nevertheless God gives evidence of longsuffering for us on account of those others' virtue.

(23) For proof that such persons' good standing is a means of winning longsuffering for us, take heed in that very story to what he says to the patriarch: "'If I find ten good people, I will not destroy the city.'" Why do I say ten good people? No one was found there free from lawlessness, except alone the good man Lot and his two daughters. His wife, you remember, perhaps on his account escaped punishment in the city but paid later the penalty for her own indifference.³¹ Now, however, since through God's ineffable love the growth of religion was taking place, there were many people unobtrusively in the heart of the cities capable of appealing to

30. Cf. Mark 9.48.

31. Again, as we have seen so often, *rhathumia*, "indifference," is for Chrysostom the universal cause of human failing, from the Fall to Lot's wife's misfortune in ch. 19.

God, others in hills and caves, and the virtue of these few succeeded in canceling out the wickedness of the majority.

(24) The Lord's goodness is immense, and frequently he finds his way to grant the salvation of the majority on account of a few just people. Why do I say on account of a few just people? Frequently, when a just person cannot be found in the present life, he takes pity on the living on account of the virtue of the departed, and cries aloud in the words, "I will protect this city for my own sake and the sake of my servant David."³² Even if they do not deserve to be saved, he is saying, and have no claim on salvation, yet since showing love is habitual with me and I am prompt to have pity and rescue them from disaster, for my own sake and the sake of my servant David I will act as a shield; he who passed on from this life many years before will prove the salvation of those who have fallen victim to their own indifference.

(25) Do you see the Lord's loving kindness in having regard for those people conspicuous for virtue, giving them pride of place and showing esteem for them ahead of the whole multitude? Hence Paul too said, "They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, distressed, ill treated, of whom the world was not worthy."³³ This whole universe, he is saying, this whole world could not be compared with those people living in distress, mistreated, poorly clothed, ever on the move, living in caves for the sake of God. [393] So, dearly beloved, whenever you see a man clad on the outside in shabby clothing but invested with virtue within, far from despising him for his appearance acknowledge the wealth of his soul and his splendor within, and then you will discover the virtue glowing in every part of him.

(26) The blessed Elias was like that; he had only a sheepskin, and Achaab, who was dressed in purple, had need of his sheepskin. Do you see Achaab's indigence, on the one hand, and on the other the wealth of Elias? See also how different they were in power. The latter's sheepskin shut off the heavens; it stopped the fall of rain, and the prophet's

32. 2 Kgs 19.34.

33. Heb 11.37-38.

tongue proved a brake on the heavens so that for three years and six months there was no rain. The man wearing purple and diadem went about seeking the prophet, powerless to gain any advantage from his royalty. But see the Lord's loving kindness. When he saw the prophet moved by zeal and great ardor and inflicting this terrible punishment on the whole earth, he said to him in case he too should incur punishment along with them and likewise be punished for their wickedness: "'Rise and set out for Sarpeta, a town of Sidon. You see, I will instruct a widow there to look after you.' He rose and set out."³⁴

(27) See the grace of the Spirit, dearly beloved; yesterday, too, our whole sermon was devoted to hospitality and, lo, to-day this hospitable widow is about to cap off our sermon for us. "He paid a call on the widow," the text goes on, "and found her gathering wood; he said to her, 'Give me a little water to drink.'" She obeyed. "He said to her again, 'Make me a biscuit to eat.'"³⁵ Now, however, she reveals her extreme poverty, or rather her unspeakable wealth: the degree of her poverty betrays the extent of her wealth. She said: "'Your servant has only a handful of flour and a little oil in a jar for my children and me to eat and then die.'" Piteous words, enough to melt even a heart of stone. Now, she says, there is no hope of survival; death is at our door; all that is left for our life is this, hardly enough for me and my children. What lay within my power I have done: I have shared the water with you.

(28) But, for us to learn both the woman's hospitality and the good man's extreme readiness to make request, see what happens. When the prophet grasped everything precisely, in order to reveal to us the woman's virtue (God, after all, it was who said, "'I have instructed a woman to look after you,'" he being the one working through the prophet) he said to her,

34. 1 Kgs 17.9-10.

35. Chrysostom is roughly paraphrasing the text of this incident in 1 Kgs 17.8-16. De Montfaucon notes that Chrysostom cites the example of the widow of Zarephath on other occasions—a rare enough reference to the OT historical books. See Introduction (18) in FOTC 74.

“‘First make something to eat for me, and then for your children.’” Take heed, ladies, you who are affluent and spend your substance on countless inanities, often unable to bring yourself to offer two pennies to the needy despite your own indulgence, nor to a poor man of virtue for God’s sake.³⁶ This woman, on the contrary, had nothing more than a handful of flour and was shortly, as she imagined, to witness the death of her children; but hearing from the prophet, “‘First make something for me, and then for you and your children,’” she offered no objection, she did not tarry. Instead, she carried out the command, instructing us all to prefer [394] God’s servants to our own rest, and not to pass idly by such great advantage but rather to realize a great recompense will come to us on their account.

(29) See, at any rate, how this widow, in return for a handful of flour and a little oil, gained access to an eternal threshing floor. After her care of the prophet, remember, the handful of flour was not exhausted nor was the oil cruet, though the whole earth was being destroyed by famine. And the truly remarkable feature is that there was no longer any need of effort; instead, she always had plenty of flour and oil without having recourse to farming or the help of oxen or any other skills, but rather was able to see it all happening outside the natural processes. Whereas the king in his crown was at a loss and perishing with hunger, the needy widow, deprived of everything, found herself in enduring prosperity for welcoming the prophet. Hence Christ also said, “Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward.”³⁷ You saw yesterday how much the patriarch was granted for giving evidence of lavish hospitality with great ardor; see also the Sidonian woman suddenly enjoying untold wealth. You see, the prophet’s tongue, which had held the heavens back with a bridle, caused the handful of flour and the cruet of oil to flow like a river.

36. Is it the life of Antioch at the same time or Chrysostom’s own prejudices that lead him often to lecture the ladies on extravagance and neglect of the poor, while the men (*anēr* in this case) are generally the figures of virtue? See Introduction (14) in FOTC 74.

37. Matt 10.41.

(30) Let us all, men and women alike, imitate this woman. I had in fact intended encouraging you to emulation of the prophet and imitation of his virtue; but this seemed to be a problem for you. Though he was a human being, clad in flesh like us and sharing the same nature as ours, yet he exerted himself in generous measure and chose virtue, and so he was accorded grace from above. But at this point let us also imitate this woman, and then we will gradually come to imitate the prophet as well. Accordingly, let us emulate her hospitality, and let no one in the future offer the pretext of poverty. Poor though you may be, you would not be poorer than this woman, who had food enough for one day only without being unresponsive on that account to the good man's request; instead, by displaying great enthusiasm she won a swift recompense. This is the way, you see, things are with the Lord: he is accustomed to bestow great gifts for small services. After all, why was it, tell me, that he conferred all that she received? Our Lord is not in the habit of attending to the amount but to the generosity of attitude, and on that score little things become great, and great things are often made paltry whenever deeds are performed without a cheerful enthusiasm. Hence also that widow in the gospel, when many people were putting much money in the treasury, surpassed them all by putting in two small coins, not because she put in more than the others but because she gave evidence of her generous attitude. Whereas the others, it says, remember, did this out of their surplus, she on the contrary put in all she had.³⁸ She put in her whole life, you see.

(31) Let us men imitate the women and not be seen to be inferior to them, but be zealous not only to expend our substance on our own enjoyment but also to show great care for the needy and do it with enthusiasm and joyfulness. The farmer, you see, in sowing seed in the soil, far from working at it gloomily, rejoices and exults already in his expectation, thinking he sees the sheaves [395] fully grown, and in this manner he casts the seed on the soil. In your case, therefore,

38. Luke 21.1-4.

dearly beloved, don't regard only the person receiving from you, nor the cost outlaid; consider instead that while the person who receives from you is before your eyes, another takes as done to himself the things done to the poor, and he is no casual observer but the Lord of all, the Ruler of all, Creator of heaven and earth, and that this outlay earns interest, not only not diminishing your capital but rather augmenting it, provided you do this with faith and cheerful enthusiasm. Let me nominate the chief of these benefits: along with the interest on this outlay you have also the advantage of pardon for sin—and what could compare with that?

(32) So if we want to know how to gain real wealth, and along with the wealth find pardon for sin as well, let us pour our possessions into the hands of the needy and thus send them ahead of us to heaven, where there is neither thief, nor robber, nor burglar, no plotting by servants nor anything else capable of impairing our wealth. That place, you see, is protection against such harm. Only, let us not do it from vainglory but in response to the laws given us by him so as to win the praise, not of human beings but of the common Lord of all, and thus we may not suffer the expense and yet lose the profit. I mean, as the wealth that is deposited there by the hand of the poor is proof against all other schemes, so it is at risk only to vainglory; and as here on earth worm and moth cause the ruin of clothing, so vainglory has this effect on the wealth amassed from almsgiving.

(33) Hence, I beseech you, let us not only practice almsgiving, but also do it carefully so that we may gain great blessings in return for small, incorruptible for those that are passing, and eternal for those that are temporary, and that with all these we may also succeed in attaining the forgiveness of sins and those ineffable good things. May this be the good fortune of all of us to arrive at, thanks to the grace and loving kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the holy and lifegiving Spirit,³⁹ be glory now and forever, for ages of ages. Amen.

39. An unusual variation of the customary doxology.

HOMILY 43

"Now, the two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening," the text goes on.¹



AS A FLOWERY [395] MEADOW displays in itself different flowers of many hues, so Sacred Scripture displays to us the virtues of good people, not so that we may enjoy only for a short time their fragrance as with the flowers, but for us to gain from them a benefit that is lasting. You see, in the former case we only picked flowers by hand, and after a short time they faded and lost their particular beauty. But in the present case it is different; instead, when we come by the virtues of good people through hearing and lay them up in the recesses of our mind, we are able to enjoy their fragrance for all time, if we want.

(2) So, come now, since the fragrance of holy ones mentioned in Sacred Scripture is so great, today let us come to know the fragrance of Lot so that we may learn precisely how association with the patriarch led him to the very pinnacle of virtue and how, by following in his footsteps, he, too, gave evidence in practice of hospitality in his own right. For our sermon to become clearer to you, however, it would be worth listening to the very words of Scripture. "Now, the two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening," the text says. Why did it begin in this way, "Now, the two angels arrived at Sodom in the [396] evening"? After the friendly interlude with the patriarch they made tracks from there, whereas the caring and loving God, faithful to his characteristic goodness, under the appearance of human form stayed conversing with the patriarch, as you heard yesterday. His intention was to teach us

1. Gen 19.1.

both the extraordinary degree of his own longsuffering and the patriarch's affection. The angels, on the other hand, made for Sodom. Following its sequence Sacred Scripture at this point tells us, "Now, the two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening" in discharge of their mission.

(3) See the precision and minute observation² of Sacred Scripture in indicating to us the time that they arrived; "in the evening," it says, remember. Why did it reveal the time? Why did they arrive in the evening?³ To show us the great degree of Lot's hospitality. You see, just as the patriarch was seated at the hour of midday when he observed the visitors and set about snaring them by running to meet them and welcoming the travelers with joy, in just the same way this good man, too, though aware of the evil behavior of the inhabitants of Sodom, did not excuse himself from the task of remaining in wait even at evening time but remained at his post till then in case some treasure should come his way and he might be in a position to reap the fruit of hospitality. The extraordinary degree of this good man's virtue is really remarkable in that, though living in the midst of such villains, he not only had grown more indifferent but even gave evidence of much greater virtue; while all had tumbled into the abyss, so to say, he alone in all that multitude was treading the straight and narrow.

(4) Where now are those who say that it is not possible for someone growing up in the environment of the city to keep one's virtue, but for this is required retreat and a life in the mountains, and that it is not possible for the man of the house, with a wife and with children and servants to look after, to be virtuous? Accordingly, let them see this good man with a wife, children and servants, living in the city, passing his days amidst so many scoundrels and villains, and standing

2. Chrysostom's term for this, *paratērēsis*, which occurs a few times in the Genesis homilies (cf. Homily 36 [Migne col. 338], Homily 53 [467]), has much the same sense as the more frequent *akribēia*.

3. Chrysostom does not remark, as does the modern commentator Speiser, that following their late afternoon meal the travelers had a distance of forty miles to cover by evening (*Genesis*, 138). Precision is not always expedient, it seems.

out like some spark in the open sea, not only unquenched but emitting a resplendent light. I say this, not to oppose retreat from the cities nor to discourage life in the mountains and deserts,⁴ but to show that for a person intent on remaining vigilant and alert none of these things proves an obstacle. So just as for the indifferent and faint of heart the desert is of no avail, since in fact it is not place that affects virtue but attitude and inclination, likewise, for a person that is vigilant and alert, living in the environment of the city cannot bring any harm.

(5) Hence I would prefer virtuous people in particular, like this blessed man, to be in the environment of cities so that they would be like yeast to the others and lead many to imitation of them. Since, however, this seems to be difficult to achieve, let the alternative happen. "The form of this world, after all, is now passing away,"⁵ and the present life is brief; if now while we are still in the arena we do not engage in the struggle of virtue and escape the snares of wickedness, later on it will be futile for us to blame ourselves when repentance brings no benefit. You see, while we are in the present life it is possible for us to gain some advantage from repenting and by washing away our former sins to be found worthy of the Lord's loving kindness; but if we are suddenly snatched away while letting slip this present opportunity, we will then be sorry [397] but will gain no benefit from it.

(6) For proof of this, listen to the inspired author's words, "Now, who will express his faith in you in hell?"⁶ and again, "Will a man be able to ransom himself or his brother?"⁷ There will be no one then, the text is saying, able to rescue from there a victim of his own indifference, be he brother or father or mother. Why do I say brother or father or mother? Not even the just themselves, who have good grounds for confidence, will be of any assistance to us then if we have now been guilty of indifference. Scripture says, remember, "Even

4. His biographers tell us of Chrysostom's own early experience of such a situation.

5. 1 Cor 7.31.

7. Ps 49.7 in the LXX.

6. Ps 6.5.

if Noe and Job and Daniel were there, they would not rescue their own sons and daughters."⁸ See the magnitude of the threat and the kind of just people he brought forward as examples. These men, you see, at a critical time proved a source of salvation even to others: Noe saved his wife and sons when that terrible deluge overwhelmed the world; Job likewise proved a source of salvation even to others; and Daniel rescued many from death when that awful barbarian in his quest for things beyond human nature wanted to do away with the Chaldeans, the Magi and Gazarenes.

(7) In case we should think that some such things will happen even in the future age and that virtuous people with grounds for confidence would be able to free from the punishment there their own friends who have lived a life of indifference here, accordingly he brought these good people forward as reminders to us, aggravating our dread and teaching us that our hope of salvation rests in our own good deeds following grace from on high, and that we should not place great importance on our forebears' virtue if we ourselves happen to be guilty of wickedness, nor on anything else. Rather, we should make this alone the object of attention: if we have virtuous forebears, to imitate their virtue; if the contrary is true and we come from disreputable forebears, not to think any handicap results from this but to fall to the labors virtue involves, no harm ensuing from this, to be sure. After all, each person will be either rewarded or condemned for the works performed, as blessed Paul also says, "So that each one may be rewarded by good or ill for what he has done in the body,"⁹ and again, "He will reward everyone according to his works."¹⁰

(8) Aware of all this, let us shake off all indifference and set much store by virtue. While we are still in the arena and before the show is over, let us concentrate on our salvation so that by practicing virtue in this brief period we may gain a reward for it in the age that never ends. Just as this good

8. Ezek 14.20 in Chrysostom's own version.

9. 2 Cor 5.10.

10. Rom 2.6.

man, living among so many villains, with no one to imitate his virtue but everyone scoffing at him to his face and ridiculing him, did not only not become less vigilant but even proved so conspicuous as to be judged worthy of entertaining angels; when everyone else was completely destroyed, he alone with his daughters escaped the destruction inflicted on them.

(9) But let us take up the thread of our sermon. "Now, the two angels," the text says, "arrived at Sodom in the evening." The time in particular shows us this good man's extraordinary virtue in the fact that even despite the coming of evening he stayed at his post and did not leave it. That is to say, since he realized the advantage accruing to him from that, consequently he was anxious to attain the wealth and brought great vigilance to bear, not even desisting at the end of the day. This, you see, is what a fervent and vigilant soul [398] is like: far from being impeded by any obstacles from giving evidence of its virtue, it is spurred on to greater heights by the very impediments in particular and burns with a brighter flame of desire. "Now, on seeing them," the text goes on, "Lot rose to meet them." Let this be heeded by those who are given to repulsing people who call on them with requests to make and causes to plead, and who show them great inhumanity. I mean, see how this good man did not wait till the visitors reached him but like the patriarch, without knowing who the visitors were but presuming that they were travelers of some kind, well nigh jumped for joy on seeing them, as though falling upon his prey and not missing the object of his desire.

(10) "On seeing them," the text says, note, "he rose to meet them and prostrated himself on the ground." He gave thanks to God for being found worthy to welcome the visitors. Notice his virtue of soul: he considered it a great kindness on God's part to encounter these men and by welcoming them to fulfill his private longing. Now, don't tell me they were angels; remember, rather, that this good man did not realize that yet but behaved as though receiving unknown travelers. "He said, 'Lo, sirs, break off your journey at your servant's house,

rest and bathe your feet; then rise early and resume your journey.’”¹¹ These words are sufficient to reveal the virtue residing in the good man’s soul: how could you help being amazed at his exceeding humility and the fervor with which he displayed his hospitality? “‘Lo, sirs,’” he said, “‘break off your journey at your servant’s house.’” He addresses them as “sirs” and calls himself their servant. Let us listen precisely, dearly beloved, to these words and learn how we too can do likewise. This man of good name and reputation, enjoying great prosperity, a householder, addresses as master these travelers, these strangers, unknown, unprepossessing, wayfarers, no connections of his, and says, “‘Break off your journey at your servant’s house and rest.’” You see, evening has fallen, he says; accede to my wish and assuage the day’s hardship by resting in the home of your servant. I mean, surely I’m not offering you anything wonderful? “‘Bathe your feet’” wearied with traveling, “‘and rise early and resume your journey.’” So do me this favor and don’t refuse my entreaty.

(11) “They replied,” the text goes on, “‘No, instead, we shall rest in the street.’” Seeing that despite his entreaty they declined, he did not lose heart, he did not give up what he was intent on, he did not have the kinds of feelings we often do. If at any time we want to win someone over and then we see them somewhat reluctant, we immediately desist; this is due to our doing it without ardor and longing and especially to our thinking that we have excuse enough to be able to say that at any rate we did our best. What do you mean, you have done your best? You have let slip the prey, you have missed the treasure—is this doing your best? Then you would have done your best if you hadn’t let the treasure slip through your fingers, if you hadn’t bypassed the prey, if your display of hospitality was limited to a perfunctory remark.

(12) Not so the just man; instead, what? When he saw [399] them resisting and bent on resting in the street (the angels did this out of a wish to reveal more clearly the just man’s virtue and to teach us all the extent of his hospitality), then

11. Gen 19.2.

he in turn did not stop at making entreaty in words but also applied force. Hence Christ also said, "Men of violence seize the kingdom of heaven."¹² In other words, where spiritual advantage is involved, pressure is in order and violence commendable. "He compelled them,"¹³ the text says. It seems to me he drew them in against their will. Then when they saw the just man applying this effort and not desisting until he should achieve the object of his desire, "they turned aside to him and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them, cooking flat bread for them; they ate before lying down."¹⁴ Do you see here as well hospitality manifested, not in richness of fare but in generosity of attitude? I mean, when he succeeded in bringing them into his house, at once he gave evidence of the signs of hospitality. He occupied himself in attending on them, providing something to eat and giving evidence of respect and attention to the visitors in his belief that they were only human beings, travelers of some kind.

(13) "The men of the town, however, the Sodomites surrounded the house, the whole population at once, from young to old, and called out to Lot, saying to him, 'Where are the men who are staying the night at your place? Bring them out to us so that we may have intercourse with them.'¹⁵ Let us not pass these words idly by, dearly beloved, nor see in them only their quite inexcusable frenzy, but consider rather how the just man, by living in the midst of such monstrous animals, was so conspicuous and gave evidence of such an extraordinary degree of virtue in being able to put up with their lawlessness, in not shifting from there, in bringing himself to have converse with them. How he managed, I will tell you. The Lord of all had foreknowledge of their excessive wickedness and arranged for this just man to dwell there so that like a skillful physician he might be able to get the better of their ailments. When, however, he saw that their illness was incurable and they had no intention of accepting any treatment, he still did not give up. A doctor is like that, after all;

12. Matt 11.12.

14. Gen 19.3-4.

13. Gen 19.3.

15. Gen 19.4-5.

if he sees the ailments proving too much for the treatment, he doesn't stop exerting all his energies, so that on the off-chance of being able to reclaim the patient in due time he may demonstrate the virtue of his treatment; if, on the other hand, he achieves nothing more, he has the most telling excuse in that he left nothing undone appropriate to the case.

(14) This, in fact, is what happened here: this good man was even reared amongst them, and by demonstrating his sound commonsense he remained good in this way, whereas the others were consequently left without any excuse on account of not only refusing to give up their evil ways but even taking them to further excess. Observe: "They surrounded the house," the text says, "from young to old, the whole population at once." Extraordinary their unity in evildoing, overwhelming the impetus of their wickedness, beyond all telling the excess of their lawlessness, without defense this endeavor of theirs. "From young to old," the text says. Not only was youth in search of these lawless pleasures, it is saying, but even the elderly, the whole population at once. They did not stop short of this reckless and shameless exploit, nor take heed of that unsleeping eye, nor blush at [400] the just man, nor spare the men thought to be strangers, resting there as guests of the just man; instead, brazenly and, so to say, with head bared they made their demands in those licentious terms, calling out to the good man, "'Where are the men who are staying at your place? Bring them out so that we may have intercourse with them.'"

(15) I think it was on account of their insolence and lawless behavior that the just man sat waiting until evening, so as not to allow any unsuspecting traveler to fall into their clutches. For his part the good man gave evidence of the extraordinary degree of his own probity along with his hospitality, taking pains to welcome all travelers and letting no one escape him, and thinking in the present case as well that they were not angels but human beings. Those lawless men, on the contrary, as well as giving no evidence of any such concern as the just man's, were intent only on committing crimes. So the reason why the angels intended to rest in the street was to provide

the just man with an opportunity of showing them hospitality and to demonstrate to him in action how those guilty of lawlessness to such an extraordinary degree were about to incur a fitting punishment.

(16) Let us now, however, see the extent of the good man's virtue. "He went outside to them in the entrance," the text goes on, "closed the door, and said to them."¹⁶ See how the just man was in fear and trembling for the safety of the strangers; it wasn't without purpose that he closed the door behind him:¹⁷ he knew their frenzy and boldness and, suspecting rash behavior on their part, he then said to them, "By no means, brothers." O what longsuffering on the just man's part, what extraordinary humility! This is true virtue, to relate to such people with restraint. I mean, no one wanting to cure a sick person or bring a maniac to his senses goes about it with roughness and bad temper. Consider, in fact, how he calls these men brothers, despite their intent to commit such heinous crimes, wishing as he did to dissuade them, appeal to their conscience and divert them from their disgusting purpose.

(17) "By no means, brothers," he says, "'don't be so depraved.'" Don't entertain such ideas, he is saying, don't think of doing such awful things, don't be false to your very nature, don't even imagine such illicit relations. But if you're bent on satisfying the frenzy of your passion, I will supply the means of rendering your exploit less serious. "I have two daughters, who have had no relations with men."¹⁸ They are still without experience of marital intercourse, in fact they are virgins, in their prime, with the bloom of youth upon them; I will hand them over to you to be used as you wish. Take them, he says, and on them spend your lust and discharge your evil desires. "Only don't do any wrong to these men, since they have found protection under my roof." Since I obliged them, he is saying, to come under my roof lest crimes committed

16. Gen 19.6-7.

17. The two words that Chrysostom's version of v. 6 omitted from the LXX text.

18. Gen 19.8.

against them be attributed to me and I be held guilty of this insult to them, consequently I offer my two daughters for them to save them from your hands.

(18) What marvelous virtue in the just man! He surpassed all the standards of hospitality! I mean, how could anyone do justice to the good man's friendliness in not bringing himself to spare even his daughters so as to demonstrate his regard for the strangers and save them from the lawlessness of [401] the Sodomites?¹⁹ Whereas this man hands over his own daughters so as to rescue from outrage by lawless men these strangers, these travelers (again I make the same point, notice) who were not known to him from any source, we, on the other hand, often are content to see our brothers brought to the very depths of impiety and, so to say, into the devil's jaws without troubling to share advice with them, counsel them, offer encouragement in word, snatch them from evil and guide them towards virtue.

(19) So what excuse would we have if, whereas the good man did not spare his daughters out of concern for the strangers, we on the contrary are so inclined to be heedless about our own brothers and often utter those frivolities and remarks full of inanity? After all, one says, what have I in common with him? He's no concern of mine, I have nothing to do with him. What are you saying, human being that you are? You have nothing in common with him? He is your brother, he shares the same nature as yours, you are both subject to the same Lord, in fact often you share the same table—I mean the awesome spiritual one—and yet you say, I have nothing in common with him, and you pass him by heedlessly, offering him no hand as he lies there. Whereas the Law bade the Jews not to ignore even enemies' animals that had fallen down, you on the contrary are often content

19. Chrysostom's congregation must have wondered if he spoke with tongue in cheek in commending Lot's behavior in this incident, driven as he is by the logic of his school to treat all elements in these patriarchal narratives without discrimination. Von Rad notes that "this procedure to which Lot resorted scarcely suited the sensibility of the ancient Israelite" (*Genesis*, 218), and Chrysostom would be aware of its impact on his listeners; so he quite quickly gives the sermon a moral twist.

to see your brother lying wounded in the devil's power, not on the ground but in the depths of sin, without lifting him up with your encouragement, offering him your advice or taking pains to bring others to his aid, if that is possible, so as to free a part of your own body from the jaws of the beast and return him to his pristine nobility, so that if—God forbid—you yourself should ever fall into the snares of that awful demon, you would be in a position to have friends to protect you and free you from the devil's hands.

(20) Paul also speaks to the same effect in his wish to prompt the Galatians to care of their own limbs, "Considering yourself in case you too should be tempted,"²⁰ as if to say, If you pass your brother by without sympathy or attention, perhaps someone else will pass you by, too, when you have fallen. So if you would prefer not to be ignored if ever you come to grief, don't ignore others yourself but give evidence of deep affection and consider it a wonderful boon to be in a position to rescue your brother. Nothing, in fact, would be on a par with this as far as virtue is concerned. I mean, if you only consider that this person whom you ignore and pass by is accorded such respect by the Lord that on his account he did not decline even to shed his own blood (as Paul also says, "Your weak brother will perish by your knowledge after Christ died for him"²¹), how will you not bury yourself in the earth for shame? Consequently, if for his sake Christ even shed his blood, what great gesture are you making if you show him affection, raise him from the ground with encouragement by word of mouth, lift from the depths of evil his spirit that has perhaps been immersed and overwhelmed, and cause him to see the light of virtue and not run back to the darkness of evil?

(21) Accordingly, let us imitate this just man, I beseech you, and if it is necessary to run some risk in being active for the salvation of our neighbor, let us not decline to do so. Such a risk, in fact, will prove an occasion of salvation for us and a cause of great confidence. Consider, I ask you, how this just

20. Gal 6.1.

21. 1 Cor 8.11.

man stood up to the whole population, evincing as they were a common purpose for evil, and with great restraint [402] gave evidence of unspeakable bravery in the hope of being able in this way to deflect them from their unbridled passion. Despite those words, you see, his exceeding restraint and his apparent offer to give his daughter into their hands, what did they say to him? “‘Get out of the way.’”²² O what extraordinary sottishness, what extreme stupidity! This, in fact, is what wicked and unrestrained lust is like: when it overpowers the reason, it prevents it from recognizing anything that is needful, and in fact it does everything as if in darkness and some nocturnal battle.

(22) “‘Get out of the way,’” they said. “‘You came here to dwell as an alien; surely you’re not making the decisions? All right, now we’ll treat you worse than them.’” See how, whereas the just man spoke with restraint to them, they indulged in extreme audacity by contrast. As though now brought to a pitch of frenzy by the devil and under his power, they beset the good man in this fashion, saying, “‘You came here to dwell as an alien; surely you’re not making the decisions?’” We accepted you as a visitor; surely you haven’t turned into our judge? O height of ingratitude! They should have felt shame, they should have respected the just man’s advice, but on the contrary, like lunatics bent on assailing their doctor, they spoke to him thus: “‘We will treat you worse than them.’” If you’re not prepared to hold your peace, they said, you will learn that your defense of them is of no avail except to put you at risk while they escape it. “They set upon Lot with a will,” the text goes on. See this just man displaying such bravery and endeavoring to oppose such a large mob. “They pressed forward to break the door down.” You see, since he was about to come out and had closed the door behind him in view of their rage, these frantic and lawless people couldn’t tolerate the just man’s exhortation, and so they laid hands on him and tried to break the door down.

(23) Since, however, the just man’s virtue had been dem-

22. Gen 19.9.

onstrated in action, as well as his concern for those thought to be strangers and the concerted drive towards evil on the part of all that crowd, then at that point the visitors revealed their identity. On seeing the good man exerting himself in every way, they gave evidence of their special power by coming to the good man's aid as he was being overpowered by their frenzy. "The men put out their hands," the text goes on, remember, "pulled Lot in the house with them, and slammed the door of the house. But the men who were at the door of the house they struck with blindness, one and all, and they were paralyzed as they attempted to find the door."²³ Do you see this just man, too, immediately gains the reward for hospitality and those lawless people pay a fitting penalty? "They pulled Lot into the house," the text says, remember, "and slammed the door. But the men they struck with blindness, one and all, and they were paralyzed as they attempted to find the door." Since their mind's eye had been blinded, they suffered loss of sight as well for the reason that you might learn that bodily eyes were of no benefit to them if the eyes of their mind were blinded. Since they gave evidence of concert in evil, with neither young nor old desisting from their wicked exploit, consequently all were blinded, the text points out. Not only were they afflicted with blindness, but as well the strength of their body was undermined: since they had lost control of the soul, the superior part of their person, consequently they also lost the power of their body. Those who were previously trying to break the door down and belaboring the good man with threats suddenly found themselves paralyzed, unable to see the door in front of them.

(24) At that point the good man breathed freely, seeing the identity of the visitors and the greatness of their power. The text goes on: "The men said to him, [403] 'Is there anyone of yours here—sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or anyone else in the city?'"²⁴ See how they reward the good man for his hospital-

²³. Gen 19.10-11.

²⁴. Gen 19.12. Speiser notes the unusual insertion and positioning of "son-in-law," especially in the singular unlike the plural of the LXX, and

ity, and how they wish to grant him the salvation of all his family. If there is anyone belonging to you in the city, it says, if there is anyone you're close to, if you know anyone to be unconnected with these people's lawlessness, "'take them out of this place'" and this country, and take out all your relatives. "'For we are about to destroy this place.'" ²⁵ Then they gave the reason, teaching the just man everything with precision: "'Because the outcry against them,'" it says, "'has risen up in the Lord's hearing, and the Lord has sent up to wipe them out.'" This is what had been said to the patriarch, namely, that "'the outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah has come to me more and more.'" ²⁶ "'The outcry against them has risen up in the Lord's hearing,'" it says here.

(25) Extreme the extent of their lawlessness, and accordingly, since their disease was beyond cure and their wound admitted of no treatment, the Lord sent them to destroy it. This is what blessed David said: "He makes the winds his messengers and the flame of fire his ministers." ²⁷ Since we have come, it says, to destroy the whole region (the country suffered the punishment for the wickedness of its inhabitants, you see), leave here. Hearing this, and realizing the reason for the visit of these men, as it seemed, who were in reality angels and ministers of the God of all, the good man "went out and spoke to his sons-in-law who had taken his daughters in marriage." ²⁸ Actually, he said before to those villains, "'Lo, I have two daughters, who have had no relations with men'" ²⁹; so how does the text say, "to his sons-in-law who had taken his daughters in marriage"? Don't think this contradicts what was said by the good man previously: it was customary with

concludes it is an intrusion from v. 14. Chrysostom, interestingly, retains the singular against the LXX. For a discussion of Chrysostom's peculiar OT text, see Introduction (15) in FOTC 74, and D. S. Wallace-Hadrill, *Christian Antioch*, p. 30.

25. Gen 19.13.

26. Gen 18.20.

27. Ps 104.4.

28. Gen 19.4, where the LXX takes an ambiguous Hebrew verb form to mean the marriage had been finalized, thus posing a problem for Chrysostom.

29. Gen 19.8.

people in olden times to celebrate the betrothal ahead of time, and often for the betrothed to live together and at the same time to live with their parents, something which happens even today in many places. So since the ceremony of betrothal had already taken place, hence it calls them sons-in-law and says, “‘those who had taken his daughters in marriage,’” having taken them in intention and by mutual consent.

(26) “He said, ‘Away, leave the place, for the Lord is going to destroy the city.’ But in the eyes of his sons-in-law he seemed to be joking.” See how these men were affected by that evil influence. Hence, since God wanted to free the just man quickly from association with them, he did not allow the just man’s daughters to mingle with them, but instead he carried these men off ahead of time with the evil ones so that the good man should leave with his daughters and avoid association with them. Accordingly, when they heard that dire prediction from the just man, they made as if to scoff at him, thinking what he said was a joke. Nevertheless the just man did what he could, and since he had once betrothed his daughters to them, he wanted to rescue them from punishment, but they wouldn’t have it, and instead persisted in their evil way, and later came to know by the events themselves that it was to their loss that they had rejected the just man’s advice.

(27) “At the crack of dawn, however, the angels urged Lot on: ‘Away, take your wife and the two daughters you have and set out in case you are destroyed along with the villains of the city.’ They were upset.”³⁰ Don’t delay, it is saying: already destruction must [404] fall on them. So save yourself, your wife and your two daughters. In fact, for being unwilling to respond to his advice, those men before long will share in the destruction with the rest. So don’t delay, in case you yourself as well share in the destruction of the villains. “They were upset” to hear this, referring to Lot, his wife and daughters; “they were upset,” it says, that is, they became fearful, they fell into an awful dread, they were distressed by the threat.

30. Gen 19.15–16.

Hence, out of care for the good man "the angels took his hand," the text adds. Scripture no longer talks of men; instead, since they were about to inflict punishment, it calls them angels in saying, "They took his hand, his wife's hand and his daughters' hands as the Lord spared him." They comforted them by taking their hand and strengthened their spirit lest fear should undermine their strength; hence the text added, "as the Lord spared him."

(28) You see, since the Lord judged him deserving of salvation (the text says), accordingly the angels also wished to strengthen their spirit and so took their hand, "led them out and said, 'Save yourself. Don't look back or stop anywhere in the district. Take refuge in the mountains lest at any time you be involved.'"³¹ Since we have now freed you from these villains, it is saying, no longer look back or want to see what is about to happen to them; instead, make all speed and reach a distant place so as to escape the punishment being inflicted on them. Then the good man, being afraid that he might never succeed in reaching the place specified by them and arrive at the mountain, said, "I beg you, sir, since your servant has found mercy in your sight and you have marvelously shown your goodness in my regard by saving my life: I could not reach the mountain in safety without danger overtaking me and I will die. See, this city is near enough for me to flee to; it is tiny, I will be safe there, my life will be spared thanks to you."³² Although you once decided to grant me salvation, he is saying, yet reaching the top of the mountain is beyond my strength; so give evidence of further kindness to me by making the effort less demanding. In case, therefore, I be overtaken by the impending punishment and share in their fate, assign this town nearby for me. Even if in fact it is tiny and unprepossessing, yet I will be able to reach it in safety and then be secure there.

(29) "He said to him, 'Lo, I am impressed with your appearance and your request not to overwhelm the city you

31. Gen 19.17 with some departures from the LXX.

32. Gen 19.18-20.

have spoken of.'"³³ I have accepted your petition, he is saying, I will do as you say, I will concede your request, and for your sake I will even spare the city. "So be quick, take refuge in the place and save yourself; I will do nothing in fact until you arrive there.'"³⁴ In fact, he is saying, I cannot execute the deed until you arrive there. Since I care for your salvation, I await your arrival there, and only then will I inflict the punishment on them. "The sun came out on the earth, and Lot entered Segor."³⁵ He reached the town at sunrise, and as soon as he was inside the city they were punished. "The Lord rained down fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah," the text goes on, remember, "from the Lord in heaven, and he overwhelmed these cities and the whole district, all the inhabitants of the cities and every plant on earth."³⁶

(30) Don't be surprised, dearly beloved, at the expression: [405] it is characteristic of Scripture, which often employs words identically in that way, as you can now see in this case, too. "The Lord rained down fire and brimstone from the Lord in heaven," the text says, remember, intending to mean that the Lord inflicted the punishment, not only overwhelming the cities, the whole district and all the inhabitants but also wiping the plants off the face of the earth. You see, since the people inhabiting this region had given evidence of much fruit of wickedness, accordingly I am making the fruit of the earth useless, he is saying, so that with this destruction as well it may prove an everlasting reminder to later generations, teaching everyone through its peculiar barrenness the wickedness of its inhabitants. Do you see all that is involved in virtue, and in wickedness, how the just man was saved whereas the others received their just desserts? As the good man through his own virtue saved his daughters as well and averted the catastrophe from that city, likewise those others through the excess of their own evil were not only completely destroyed

33. Gen 19.21.

34. Gen 19.22 in an independent version.

35. Gen 19.23.

36. Gen 19.24-25.

themselves but were also responsible for the land being without fruit in the future.

(31) "His wife looked back," the text goes on, "and was turned into a pillar of salt."³⁷ You see, when she heard the angels bidding the good man not to cast a backward glance but to make his retreat with great haste, she disobeyed the command, did not keep their word, and accordingly paid the penalty for her indifference.

(32) Let us, on the contrary, heed it, take great care of our salvation and avoid imitating their lawlessness. Let us instead emulate the just man's hospitality and the rest of his virtue so as to avert as well the anger from on high. It is not possible, you see, it is not possible for the person who practices virtue zealously not to win great treasure thereby. After all, these just men, the patriarch and Lot, were in this way accorded grace from above; thinking they were welcoming human beings, they were even found worthy to welcome angels and the Lord of the angels. We too are permitted, if we wish, to welcome him now. He in fact it is who has said, "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me."³⁸ Accordingly, let us welcome strangers in this fashion and never have regard for their unprepossessing appearance. I mean, if on some occasions we give evidence of the practice of hospitality in such a spirit, we too will be found worthy to welcome such guests, thought to be men but in fact practicing the virtue of angels—provided we don't pry and become inquisitive at the risk of losing the treasure. Especially so, since blessed Paul also refers to them in these words to teach us how they were fortunate enough to receive such a welcome: "Do not neglect hospitality; after all, it was the cause of some people entertaining angels unawares."³⁹ This it was especially, in fact, that revealed their remarkable greatness, that unaware of their identity they still

37. Gen 19.26. Chrysostom has been conducting his commentary on these verses at an unusually rapid rate, and this verse, which would normally be such a fertile soil for him with its egregious example of *rhathumia*, "indifference," and in a woman to boot, he dispatches with utmost brevity.

38. Matt 10.40.

39. Heb 13.1.

showed them attention. So in faith and reverence let us discharge this duty so as to be able also to attain the treasure. May it be the good fortune of all of us to enjoy this, thanks to the grace and loving kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, power and honor, now and forever, for ages of ages. Amen.

HOMILY 44

"Now, Abraham rose early in the morning and went to the place where he had stood before God."¹



ESTERDAY'S [405] THEME of the Samaritan woman gave us adequate [406] instruction in the Lord's ineffable longsuffering and surpassing concern for her, as well as her gratitude.² You saw how she came to draw material water but in fact drew from divine streams coming from an invisible spring, and thus went off home, fulfilling the word of the Lord, "The water that I shall give will become a spring of water in him gushing forth to life everlasting."³ Once she had drunk her fill of that divine and spiritual spring, remember, she did not keep the waters to herself but overflowed, so to say, and poured out on the inhabitants of the town as well the grace of the gift given her; the woman, the Samaritan, the foreigner, immediately turned preacher. You saw how important gratitude of soul is, you saw the Lord's loving kindness in not scorning anyone but immediately directing his grace to anyone, be it woman or pauper—wherever at all he finds a spirit watchful and alive.

(2) Accordingly, I beseech you, let us also imitate this woman and receive the teachings of the Spirit with close attention. They are not our words, you see, nor do we utter with our own tongue whatever we say; instead, we are guided by the Lord's loving kindness for the sake of your salvation and the building up of the Church of God. So do not have

1. Gen 19.27.

2. This, in fact, was not the theme of Homily 43; the reference is lost on us, and we are encouraged to think that particularly in this post-Easter period the Genesis homilies were not necessarily given on successive days without interruption. See n. 5, *infra*.

3. John 4.14.

regard to my person as a speaker, dearly beloved, nor my poverty of expression, but to the fact that I pass on what comes from the Lord; so keep your thoughts fixed on the one who has commissioned me and in this way receive my words with lively attention.

(3) This is true in human affairs, too. When the emperor wearing his crown dispatches letters, the bearer of them is in fact of no account in himself but only someone unimportant, often with no lineage to claim, an obscure son of obscure parents. Yet those due to receive them, while giving no heed to him personally, still pay him great respect also on account of the emperor's letters, and they receive the letters in great fear and complete silence. If, then, that person who brings the letters of a human being, and bears paper and nothing more, is given a welcome by everyone, much more would you be right in receiving with great attention the sayings of the Spirit sent to you by means of us, and thus win a great reward for your right attitude. You see, if the Lord of all sees your enthusiasm of spirit, he will also provide you with generous assistance with a view to your upbuilding and will grant you deeper understanding so as to grasp what is said. After all, the grace of the Spirit is abundant and, far from undergoing any diminution when poured out on everyone, it is rather increased by distribution, and the more numerous those who share in it, the more widely the effects of grace are felt.⁴

(4) So come now, if you don't mind, let us take up the thread of what we said the other day⁵ and see where we closed the sermon and at what point we ought resume it today. Where, then, did we break our sermon and conclude our in-

4. This passage expresses in striking form Chrysostom's thinking on Scripture and his role as scriptural commentator; the simile of the emperor's letters is akin to that in Homily 2, of Moses delivering letters from God. He sees himself speaking under divine inspiration (some manuscripts employ in place of "guided" the word Chrysostom normally uses for "inspired," *enéchoumenos*, as applied to biblical authors): when he speaks, it is the Spirit speaking. He is commissioned to "pass on" what comes from the Lord, for the salvation of his listeners and the building up of the Church—all arising from God's loving kindness.

5. If *prōēn* is to be taken to mean, as often, "the day before yesterday," we can understand how the sermon on the Samaritan woman intervened.

struction? We outlined to you the story of Lot [407] and the burning of Sodom, and we stopped our sermon at the point where the just man arrived safely at Segor. "The sun came out on the earth," the text said, remember, "and Lot entered Segor,"⁶ and then that divinely inspired rage fell upon Sodom, causing the destruction of the earth; the just man's wife forgot the words of the angels, looked back, and was turned into a pillar of salt, providing later generations with an everlasting reminder of her indifference.

(5) Today, therefore, it is necessary to press on to the sequel and say something briefly so that once again you may realize the compassion and affection of the patriarch and God's favor towards him. At sunrise, remember, the good man Lot arrived safely at Segor whereas the inhabitants of Sodom met their just desserts; the patriarch both pitied them for the destruction they suffered on account of their own lawlessness and at the same time was very anxious about the good man, and so he rose early, the text says, to find out what had happened. "Abraham rose early in the morning," the text says, remember, "and went to the place where he had stood before God; he looked in the direction of the district of Sodom and Gomorrah, and, lo and behold, he saw flame rising up from the earth like steam from an oven."⁷ Reaching that place, the text says, where he had held conversation with the Lord and made intercession for the Sodomites, he saw the traces of that fearful punishment and was anxious to find news of the good man. This, after all, is the way with holy people: to be caring and compassionate.

(6) To teach us that the grace of the Spirit imparted to him knowledge about him so as to relieve him of his anxiety about Lot at the same time, Sacred Scripture says, "When the Lord wiped out the cities of the district, God was mindful of Abraham and dispatched Lot from the midst of the destruction."⁸ What is the meaning of "God was mindful of Abraham"? Of the petition he made, it means, in saying, "Surely you won't

6. Gen 19.23.

7. Gen 19.27-28, briefer than the Hebrew or LXX.

8. Gen 19.29.

destroy the good along with the impious?"⁹ So why, someone may ask, was the just man saved because of the patriarch's petition and not because of his own goodness? True, it was also because of the patriarch's petition; after all, when we do what lies in us, the intercession of the just also brings us the greatest benefit. If we are indifferent ourselves while placing the hope of our salvation in them alone, it is of no further benefit to us—not because the just are powerless but because we undermine them through our own indifference.

(7) For proof that whenever we are negligent, even if those interceding for us are just or even prophets, no benefit comes to us from it (they give evidence of their own virtue by those actions, you see, whereas no advantage will come to us from our behavior), listen to the God of all speaking to the prophet Jeremiah, who was sanctified in the womb: "Do not pray for this people, because I will not heed you."¹⁰ See the Lord's loving kindness: he makes the prediction to the prophet lest, when ignored after interceding, he should think it happened through fault of his. Hence he foretells the people's wickedness to him and bids him not to pray so that he too may be in a position to realize the extremity of their evil behavior and they may learn that the prophet is of no advantage to them if they themselves are not prepared to do what lies in them.

(8) Mindful of this, [408] dearly beloved, let us have recourse to the intercession of the saints and call on them to intercede for us, but let us not only have confidence in their prayers but let us also manage our affairs properly and undergo a change for the better so as to provide grounds for the intercession made on our behalf. This is what the Lord of all said to another prophet as well: "Don't you see what they are up to? They are heating fat and making offerings to the heavenly host,"¹¹ as if to say to him, Do you intercede for them with me even though they have not ceased their evil-

9. Gen 18.22.

10. Jer 7.16, abbreviated.

11. Jer 7.17-18 abbreviated. De Montfaucon is quick to observe that Chrysostom is quoting not another but the same prophet, Jeremiah; it is also the same passage as before.

doing and have no sense of the ailment afflicting them but rather act as though they had nothing wrong with them? Don't you see their utter arrogance? Have you no eye for their extreme folly? How could they ever fail to have their fill of impiety, but instead, like a pig in the mire, wallow in their own transgressions? After all, surely if they were prepared to be converted they would not put off all appeals? Am I not the one who cries aloud through the prophets, "And I said after her profligacy, 'After this, return to me,' but she did not return"?¹²

(9) I mean, surely I seek nothing else than a mere cessation of their wickedness and a stop to their evil? Surely I look for no accounting of past deeds if I see them willing to change? Do I not cry aloud each day, "Surely I have no real wish for the death of the sinner as for his conversion and life"?¹³ Do I not take every means to snatch from destruction those ensnared in deceit? Surely, after all, if I see them changing, I will not hesitate? Am I not the one who says, "While you are still speaking I will say, 'Lo, I am here'"?¹⁴ Surely they themselves are not so anxious for their own salvation as all peoples being saved and coming to the knowledge of truth is an object of concern to me?¹⁵ Surely I don't bring you from non-being for the purpose of destroying you? It is not in vain that I prepared the kingdom and the countless good things beyond description, was it? Did I not also make the threat of hell for the purpose of encouraging everyone by this means also to hasten towards the kingdom?

(10) Accordingly, O blessed prophet, do not exclude those people in addressing your petition to me; instead, let this be your one concern, to have their ailment cured, to bring them to a sense of their wickedness and lead them to health, and then my blessings will follow in every way. You see, I do not hesitate, I do not delay when I see a soul that is well disposed: I look for one thing alone, confession of sins, and no longer do I press charges on the sinners. Surely, after all, what is

12. Jer 3.7.

14. Is 58.9.

13. Ezek 18.23.

15. Cf. 1 Tim 2.4.

proposed by me is not heavy and burdensome, is it? If I did not know that they would become worse by not confessing their former sins, I would not even look for that. But as I know the human race lapses all the more into wickedness, I wish them to confess their former sins for this reason, that confession may prove an obstacle to their falling into the same sins.

(11) Taking all this into account, therefore, dearly beloved, and considering our Lord's loving kindness, let us not be negligent but first take great care of ourselves, cleanse the stain of our sins and thus hasten to take advantage of the intercession of the saints. You see, provided we are prepared to be vigilant and alert, even by our own appeals we will obtain the greatest benefit. After all, since our Lord is loving, he does not accede to requests on our behalf by others as readily as he does to our own. See the extraordinary degree of his goodness: [409] if he sees us giving offence, suffering dishonor, having no confidence, and then gradually rising from our depression and wishing to have recourse to the riches of his loving kindness, he immediately accedes to our requests, extends his hand to us in our abjection and raises us where we have fallen, crying aloud, "Surely the fallen will not fail to rise?"¹⁶

(12) For you to learn, however, even from experience that many people succeed in attaining what they seek by making entreaty on their own rather than by means of others, it is necessary to parade before you those who have so attained in order that we may emulate them and be prompted to imitation. Accordingly, let us hear how that Canaanite woman, foreigner though she was and sorrowful in spirit, when she saw the physician of souls and the Sun of justice arising on those sitting in darkness, made her approach with ardent and lively enthusiasm, not made more reluctant by her being a woman or a foreigner; rather, overcoming all obstacles she came forward and said, "Have pity on me, Lord, my daughter is sorely

16. Jer 8.4.

abused by a demon."¹⁷ But he who understands the unspoken thoughts of the mind kept silence and did not reply, not sparing her a word nor showing pity for the woman on seeing her approach with such lamentation; instead, he put her off, wishing to make the treasure lying unnoticed in the woman obvious to everyone. You see, he recognized the hidden pearl that he did not want to escape us; his purpose in putting her off and not deigning to reply to her was that the woman's earnest intercession should prove a lesson for everyone in future.

(13) See God's ineffable goodness: whereas he did not reply, the text says, the disciples were inclined to be more compassionate and kind but did not dare to say openly, Grant her request, have mercy on her, take pity on her. Instead, what did they say? "Have done with her, she's calling out after us,"¹⁸ as if to say, Free us from this nuisance, spare us the noise made by her. So what did the Lord do? Do you think there was no reason why I have kept silence, he said, and didn't grant her a reply? Listen: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house in Israel."¹⁹ Don't you know, he says, that the woman is a foreigner? Don't you know that I have already bidden you not to take the gentile road? So why do you heedlessly make a display of compassion? Consider God's inventive wisdom in that, although he had decided to reply, he dealt with the woman more severely than by his silence, delivering, as it were, a final blow in his wish to provoke her gradually so that the disciples, who were unaware of the faith concealed within her, might come to realize it.

(14) She, on the contrary, did not lose heart or become less persistent through seeing that the disciples achieved nothing further, nor did she say to herself, If not even they have succeeded in the appeal that they have been making on my behalf, why should I make an idle and vain entreaty? Instead, as though set alight by fire, with mind ablaze and heart in

17. Matt 15.22. Chrysostom had adduced the example of the Canaanite woman also in Homily 38.

18. Matt 15.23.

19. Matt 15.24.

anguish, she falls at his feet and pleads, "Lord, help me."²⁰ He still does not yield to the woman, but makes a severer reply than before. "It is not proper to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."²¹ Consider, dearly beloved, the remarkable desire of her soul in this case and her extraordinary faith: when she heard the word "dogs," far from being distressed or retiring, she replied with great respect, [410] "True, Lord; even the dogs eat scraps from their masters' table."²² I admit, she says, being a dog; so, as a dog grant me to be worthy of scraps from the table. Do you see the woman's faith and sincerity? She accepted his word, and immediately attained the object of her efforts, and attained it with lavish praise.

(15) What, in fact, did Christ say? "O woman, great is your faith: let it be done to you as you wish."²³ "O woman"—wonderful word, a remark redolent of warm commendation. You have given evidence of great faith, he says; consequently the things you want will come your way. See the lavishness of his generosity and the Lord's remarkable wisdom. Did we not think at the outset that he was rather lacking in compassion to repel her in that way and at first grant her not even a reply, but later through his first reply and the second one more or less rebuffing her and scaring away the woman approaching him with such ardent desire? From the conclusion, however, recognize God's goodness in employing such tardiness for the reason of his wish to render her more conspicuous. I mean, if he had acceded immediately, we would have been ignorant of the woman's virtue; but when he put her off we could understand his ineffable love and the extraordinary degree of her faith.

(16) Now, we were obliged to bring all this story to your notice so that we might learn that we get our way in prayer, not so much by means of others as on our own, when we make our petition with ardor and mind alert. Though she had the disciples interceding for her, notice, she succeeded in

20. Matt 15.25.

22. Matt 15.27.

21. Matt 15.26.

23. Matt 15.28.

gaining nothing until she persisted on her own account and so won over the Lord's loving kindness. And that parable of the friend coming to the house at dead of night suggests the same thing. "Even if he will not respond to him on account of being his friend," remember, "at least because of his importunity he will get up and give him what he asks."²⁴ So knowing our Lord's unspeakable love let us approach him, revealing and, as it were, placing before our eyes our sins in all their various kinds, and beg pardon for those in the past so that by showing great care in the future we may win greater favor from him.

(17) If you don't mind, however, let us pick up the thread of the reading.²⁵ "Now, Lot went up to Segor and settled in the hill country with his two daughters, as they were afraid to live in Segor. He dwelt in a cave with his two daughters."²⁶ Still, having a lively fear of the punishment inflicted on Sodom, the just man traveled far and settled in the hill country with his daughters, the text says, and so it happened that he was dwelling in extreme isolation and solitude with his two daughters in the hill country. "Now, the elder said to the younger," the text goes on, "'Our father is rather old, and there is no one in the land who will come to us as is customary in all the land. Come, let us ply our father with wine and sleep with him, and let us raise up seed of our father.'"²⁷

(18) Let us listen, dearly beloved, with caution and great fear to the contents of the divine Scriptures: there is nothing written there idly and to no purpose; instead, everything is said carefully and to our advantage, even if we don't understand parts of it. You see, we can't understand everything precisely; on the contrary, even if we try to assign causes [411] for some things to the extent possible to us, yet it still holds within it some treasure that is hidden and difficult to

24. Luke 11.8.

25. It has been, by any standards, a lengthy digression to establish the point that, valuable though intercession on the part of others is, one's own prayer and virtuous behavior is indispensable. One wonders how a preacher could think all this a relevant expansion of "God was mindful of Abraham"—unless some other purpose was served.

26. Gen 19.30.

27. Gen 19.31-32.

interpret.²⁸ So consider how Scripture narrated everything clearly and made known to us the intent of the just man's daughters, in one place making an adequate excuse for them, in another for the just man, lest anyone should have regard only to what took place and condemn either the good man or his daughters on the score of the licentiousness of this union.

(19) The text says, "The older said to the younger, 'Our father is rather old, and there is no one in the land who will come to us as is customary in all the land.'" Scrutinize their intent, and acquit them of any crime: they thought that total destruction had taken place and no one was still left alive; then they also saw their father's old age. So, in case the race should disappear, the text says, and we should be left without descendants (this, you see, was of particular concern to the ancients, that their line should continue through succession of offspring)—so in case we too should have to suffer complete annihilation as our father slips into old age and there is no man to be found whom we can get to mate with us and leave a succession of progeny, "'Come,'" she said, to avoid this "let us ply our father with wine.'" Since our father would never have brought himself to countenance even a word of this, let us put the stratagem into effect by means of wine. "They plied their father with wine that night, and the elder sister went in and slept with her father; he was unaware of her sleeping with him or getting up."²⁹

(20) Do you see how Sacred Scripture made excuses for the just man not once but twice? I mean, firstly from what the daughters did in practicing deceit with the aid of wine it showed that they would otherwise have been unable to convince their father to be part of it, whereas in this latter case I think what happened later took place because of design from on high so that he was so far oblivious of it as to be

28. This is a fair statement of Chrysostom's hermeneutical stance, based on his limited exegetical skills. For him, lacking critical awareness of the complexity of the formation of the patriarchal narratives, rationalizing was a much invoked rule of thumb, but, as he admits here, rationalizing can take the commentator only so far.

29. Gen 19.33.

completely unaware and so proved to be guiltless of sin. You see, those sins utterly condemn us which we commit knowingly and willingly. On the contrary, do you see Scripture giving testimony to the just man that he was completely unaware of what happened? Still another question, however, arises in the case of intoxication. What I mean is that everything should be carefully studied so that no occasion should be left to those of bad will and no sense of shame. So what should we say about it? That the instance of drunkenness befell him not so much from incontinence as from depression.

(21) Accordingly, let no one ever presume to condemn the just man or his daughters. After all, how could it be other than a mark of extreme folly and stupidity on our part, laden as we are with such countless burdens of sin, to condemn those whom Sacred Scripture discharges of all sin and for whom it rather even supplies such a remarkable defense, instead of heeding the words of Paul, "With God as your champion, who can condemn you?"³⁰ For you to learn that it was not idly or to no purpose that this happened but rather that his excessive depression allowed him to have no sense of being plied with wine, listen to what it goes on to say. "Now, it happened that next day the elder daughter said to the younger, 'Lo, last night I slept with our father; so let us ply him [412] with wine tonight as well, and you go in and sleep with him, and let us raise up seed of our father.'"³¹ Do you see how they did this from a right attitude?³² I mean, she is saying, I was able to achieve the object of my desires, and you ought to do the same thing; after all, perhaps our hopes will come to be realized and our line will not go into oblivion.

(22) "They plied their father with wine that night, too, and the younger daughter went in and slept with her father; he

30. Rom 8.33-34.

31. Gen 19.34.

32. Chrysostom's defense of these two women runs counter to his usual pattern, and is all the more surprising considering the conduct involved. It is therefore ironical that this departure from practice on Chrysostom's part runs counter to modern critical comment on the significance of the Hebrew narrative, such as Von Rad's, "Without doubt the narrative now contains indirectly a severe judgment on the incest in Lot's house" (*Genesis*, p. 224).

was unaware of her sleeping with him or getting up.”³³ Consider, dearly beloved, that the whole exploit was conducted by God’s design as with the first formed human being: as in that case, while he was asleep God allowed him to have no sensation while he took a part of his rib, shaped that rib into a woman and presented her to Adam. Exactly the same thing happened here: if the removal of the rib happened without causing pain after God put him into a trance, much more so did that happen here. What Sacred Scripture said there, “He caused a drowsiness to come upon Adam and he fell asleep,”³⁴ it also indicated here by saying, “He was unaware of her sleeping with him or getting up. They both conceived children of their father,” the text goes on. “The elder daughter bore a son, and called him Moab, meaning, of my father; he is the ancestor of the Moabites. The younger daughter also bore a son, and called him Amman, meaning, son of my race; he is the ancestor of the Ammanites.”³⁵

(23) Do you see how the exploit did not arise from incontinence for the reason that they immediately gave names to the children to commemorate the event and made a record of the exploit by the names of the children, as if by some commemorative column, so as to foretell that peoples would descend from them and the race of their offspring would develop into a huge number. One would, in fact, be the ancestor of the Moabites, Scripture says; the other, ancestor of the Ammanites. Now, in those times, since it was at the very origin of things and people wanted to leave a memorial of themselves through the continuation of the race, the just man’s daughters demonstrated such anxiety in that regard. Today, on the contrary, since through the grace of God the practice of religion has spread and, according to blessed Paul, “the form of this world is now passing away,”³⁶ let us leave a memorial of ourselves through the practice of good works so that after our passing from here the propriety of our perfect lifestyle will prove a reminder and instruction to those reflect-

33. Gen 19.35.

35. Gen 19.36–38.

34. Gen 2.21.

36. 1 Cor 7.31.

ing on us. People who are virtuous and live a life of continence, you see, can be of greatest benefit to those who observe them, not simply while they happen to be in this life, but even after passing from this life.

(24) For proof of this, consider, I ask you, what a great number of years has passed till today and how frequently we would have wished to encourage some people to emulation of this continence. We have brought to your attention Joseph, that fine, comely young man in the very prime of life, giving evidence of such fortitude in the cause of continence, and in this way we have been anxious to stir the listeners to imitation of the just man. After all, tell me, who could adequately marvel at this blessed man for the fact that, despite his finding himself enslaved and being in the bloom of youth, a time when the fire of passion is more ardently enkindled, he saw his mistress frantic to get her hands on him and yet gave evidence of such fortitude and so prepared himself for the contest chastity involves, that, though bereft of garments in fleeing [413] from that willful woman, he was nevertheless clad in the vesture of continence? We can see in this a novel and surprising example of a sheep falling into the clutches of a wolf, or rather, of a lioness, and succeeding in being saved; like a dove fleeing from attack by a hawk, so the good man escapes that woman's clutches.

(25) In my view, not so remarkable was the case of those three children who in the middle of that awful Babylonian furnace remained safe from the fire, and whose bodies came to no further harm, compared with the remarkable and surprising example of this just man falling into this furnace more lethal than the Babylonian one—I mean the Egyptian woman's incontinence—and remaining unharmed and emerging from it with the vesture of continence preserved unstained. Do you see how virtuous people prove an occasion of benefit to us, both while present here on earth and after passing from here? The reason, you see, that we drew this just man to your attention at this time was that we might all follow his example.

(26) Accordingly, let us all imitate him, prove superior to

pleasures, and in the knowledge "that our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the powers, authorities, and rulers of the darkness of this age,"³⁷ let us so arm ourselves; mindful that we, who are clad in a body, are forced to do battle with incorporeal powers, let us bring to our defense the weapons of the Spirit. You see, since we in our fleshly condition have to do battle with the invisible powers, the loving Lord provided us also with invisible weapons for this purpose that we might prevail over the enemies of our nature through the power of these weapons. Trusting, then, in the power of these weapons let us contribute what lies within us, and under the protection of this spiritual armor we will manage to strike the very eyes of the devil. In fact, he cannot bear the light flashing from that source, but even if he tries to confront it his eyes will be immediately blinded. You see, whenever there is self-control, sobriety and a numerous concert of virtues, there, also, the grace of the Spirit wings its way in generous measure. Hence, Paul too said, "Make peace with everyone your object, as also your own sanctification."³⁸ So let us purify our conscience, I beseech you, and cleanse our thinking, so that, free from all uncleanness of mind, we may win the grace of the Spirit, prevail over the devil's wiles, and be found worthy of those ineffable blessings. May it be the good fortune of us all to enjoy them, thanks to the grace and loving kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be the glory, now and forever, for ages of ages. Amen.

37. Eph 6.12.

38. Heb 12.14.

HOMILY 45

“Abraham moved from there to the southern land, and dwelt between Kadesh and Sour, sojourning at Gerar.”¹



AM PLEASED [413] to see you hurrying to listen and receiving our instruction with great relish. For this reason I for my part make it my concern to set before you this meager table, the little I have to offer, with greater enthusiasm each day. [414] Your keen appetite disguises the meager quality of the meal and makes the scraps appear lavish. You can observe this in the case of material food, too: when someone has guests that are already satiated, even if food of great variety and large amount is offered, the condition of the guests undercuts the richness of the food, and wonderful dishes seem worthy of no consideration for the reason that the guests set to without relish. Likewise when one invites to supper guests that are hungry and have an appetite, even if he lays a meager table it seems abundant owing to the anticipation of the guests who fall upon the dishes with great relish. In just the same way we too have confidence in your spiritual appetite and do not hang back, even if we have a poor and meager table, before laying it in customary manner before your good selves. This is what a certain sage also remarked: “Better a meal of vegetables with love than a beast from the manger with enmity,”² suggesting that love has a different view of what is set forth, and to its eyes ordinary things appear rich and scraps seem generous.

(2) So what better fortune could anyone have than ourselves as we address so many listeners and meet such a warm

1. Gen 20.1.

2. Prov 15.17, where Chrysostom's version approximates more closely than the LXX to the Hebrew.

and attentive response? The speaker, after all, requires nothing so urgently as approval of the listener. You see, when he sees the lively enthusiasm of the audience, he for his part is buoyed up and gains greater strength, as it were, in the knowledge that the more he spreads this spiritual table, so much the more his own well-being is enhanced. Spiritual things, after all, are opposite to material things; in the latter case generosity at table involves expense and reduces the substance of the host, whereas in the former it is directly opposite, the increase in our prosperity occurring to the extent of the numbers taking part. You see, they are not our words that we are speaking but whatever the grace of God in his characteristic love supplies for your upbuilding.³ So come now, since you give yourselves to listening with such relish and enthusiasm, let us make a study of the words read by us just now and reap some benefit from them. I mean, since according to the wonderful directive in Christ's words, "Study the Scriptures,"⁴ there is great treasure contained in the Scriptures and hidden in their depths, there is need of study for the purpose of discovering the power concealed in their depths so that we may succeed in finding great benefit there.

(3) The reason, in fact, that the grace of the Spirit arranged for the virtues of all good people to be handed down was that we might have a consistent instruction and might order our own life in the direction of zealous imitation of these good people.⁵ So let us heed what Sacred Scripture wishes today also to outline to us about the patriarch. "Abraham moved from there to the southern land," the text goes

3. Again Chrysostom's conviction of inspiration, its extent and effects: it is not simply the Scriptures that are inspired but also the scriptural homilist, and the beneficiaries of inspiration are the listeners—all as a result of God's loving kindness.

4. John 5:39, a verse that Chrysostom cites frequently as the motto of the exegetical school of Antioch that, unlike its counterpart at Alexandria, saw the scriptural text not as a point of departure but as a challenge to deeper investigation.

5. For Chrysostom the Bible is a hagiographical text, a moral compendium useful for instructing in good behavior, rather than a dogmatic outline of divine purpose; he does not follow his model, Paul, in finding the mystery of Christ sketched out in its pages.

on, "and dwelt between Kadesh and Sour, sojourning at Gerar." Moved on from where? From the place where he was camped, where he was given the privilege of hosting the Lord of all with the angels.⁶ Moving from there, the text says, "he sojourned in Gerar." Notice the life of these good people, how restrained and austere it was, how they shifted place with ease and conducted their life like pilgrims or nomads, pitching their tent at one time in this place, [415] at another in that, as though living in a strange land—unlike us, who live in a strange land as though in our home country, erecting extravagant mansions, porches and covered walks, possessing land, building baths and countless other luxuries.

(4) By contrast see the good man holding all his possessions in his household and flocks alone, and never staying in one place but at one time pitching his tent in Bethel, at another by the oak of Mambre, at another going down to Egypt, and now camping at Gerar, submitting to all this with ease and giving clear evidence in every way of gratitude to his own Lord. Despite such wonderful promises and guarantees given him by God, he saw himself beset by such imposing difficulties and encountering such varied and differing trials; yet he stood unshaken like some piece of steel, showing his godly attitude and proving no less resolute in any of the problems surrounding him. See in the present instance too, dearly beloved, the kind of trial that befell him at Gerar and the wonderful caliber of the just man's virtue, how what everyone else found unbearable and could not bring themselves to accept he put up with without complaint and without demanding from the Lord explanation of what happened, as many people do, even though weighed down with countless burdens of sin. When they encounter some difficulties they become meddlesome and inquisitive, saying, Why has this or that happened? The just man, on the contrary, didn't behave like

6. It is a sound exegetical question Chrysostom puts to the text: he realizes it is not speaking of Lot's location in the previous chapter; yet lacking awareness of the diversity of strands to the narrative he opts for the situation of ch. 18 rather than the preference of modern commentators in seeing the E document of ch. 15 now being resumed.

that; hence he enjoyed greater favor from on high. This, after all, is truly the mark of a dutiful servant, not to pry into reasons for what is done by the master but to accept everything in silence and with deep thanks.

(5) Consider how also through the very trials that ensued the just man's virtue became more resplendent, as God rendered him conspicuous in every way. You see, just as he was a stranger, unknown to anyone when he went down into Egypt, but suddenly returned from there with great notoriety, so in the present instance while sojourning at Gerar he relies on his own resources at the outset but later enjoys such wonderful assistance from God that the king and all the inhabitants of the place go to great pains to attend to the just man. "Now, Abraham said about his wife Sarrah," the text goes on, "'She is my sister.' For he was afraid to say, She is my wife, in case the men of the city should kill him on account of her."⁷ See how the just man's spirit is beset with the most violent feelings, and fear overwhelms him. Yet while it is true that his former fear, the fear of losing his wife, was extremely distressing, the fear of death overcame it. For to dispel that fear, he was prepared to see with his own eyes the one who shared his very life fall into the hands of the king. Now, how unbearable this is, those who have wives know. Hence also a sage has said, "Rage comes to a man from jealousy; he will have no mercy on the day of revenge nor will his hatred be appeased by any offering."⁸ But see how on account of the fear of death the just man nobly bore this heavy trial so intolerable to everyone.⁹

(6) This is the way things happen with bodily passions: when two of them at the one time affect our body, the intensity of the one cancels out the other so that we are completely preoccupied with its pain and often have [416] no sensation

7. Gen 20.2. The LXX adds the explanatory sentence not found in the Hebrew, perhaps under the influence of the similar incident in Egypt in ch. 12.

8. Prov 6.34-35.

9. Again, as in ch. 12, one wonders if Chrysostom has tongue in cheek in presenting cowardice in the guise of noble fortitude.

of the other, as the stronger pain overwhelms us and does not allow us to feel anything of the lesser one. In just the same way, too, this just man in the present instance saw the fear of death affecting him and considered all other things tolerable. But when you hear this, dearly beloved, don't judge the just man guilty of faintheartedness for fearing death; marvel instead at the surpassing love shown us by the Lord of all in the fact that Christ has now made an object of scorn that death which in those times was dreaded by those good and holy people, and what those virtuous people feared even while having a wonderful confidence in God is now despised by youths and tender maids. It is no longer death, you see, but a dream and departure, a change from a worse life to a better. The death of our Lord, in fact, has granted us freedom from death, and by descending into hell he has broken its bonds and crippled its force; what was fearful and cruel he has rendered so much an object of scorn that some people rush forward in haste to their departure from here. Hence Paul also shouts aloud, "To depart and to be with Christ is far better."¹⁰

(7) This, however, is the present situation, after the coming of Christ, after the breaking down of the iron doors, after the Sun of Justice has shone throughout the entire world. But in those days death still bore a terrible aspect and shook the resolve of those just men—hence they easily bore all other things, even if these happened to be unbearable. For this reason this just man was also afraid of the plotting of the inhabitants of Gerar, and in making his stay there he introduced Sarrah not as his wife but as his sister. As God allowed him to go down into Egypt in his wish for those unresponsive and unperceptive people to learn the just man's virtue, so in this case, too, the Lord gives evidence of his characteristic forbearance so that the just man's endurance as well may be conspicuous in every way and God's favor in his regard may be obvious to everyone.

(8) "But Abimelech, king of Gerar, sent someone to bring

10. Phil 1.23.

Sarrah to him." Consider, I ask you, the turmoil in his thinking suffered by the just man on seeing his wife being taken off without being able to help in any way. In fact, he bore everything in silence, knowing that the Lord was not ignoring him but would provide prompt assistance. Sarrah's great affection is also to be marveled at in wishing that the good man be rescued from danger of death; after all, she could have revealed the subterfuge and escaped the outrage that was being connived at. Instead, she endured everything in noble fashion so as to secure the just man's welfare. She fulfilled that prediction, "The two will become one flesh."¹¹ In other words, being one flesh they cared for each other's welfare and gave evidence of such harmony as to be one body and one soul.

(9) Let husbands heed this, let wives heed it: wives, so as to give evidence of such great affection for their husbands, and put nothing ahead of their own welfare; and husbands, that they might show their wives great regard and do everything as though having one soul and being one body. This, after all, is true wedlock, when such harmony operates between them, when there is such close relationship, when they are bound together in such love. You see, just as a body would never be at odds with itself nor a soul at odds with itself, so husband and wife should not [417] be at odds but united. Then also, in fact, countless blessings will be able to overflow for them. I mean, where there is such harmony, there is a concert of all blessings, there is peace, there is love, there is spiritual joy; no war, no fighting, no hostility or hatred—instead, all these are absent, all these are removed by the root of those blessings, namely, harmony.

(10) "But Abimelech, king of Gerar, sent someone to bring Sarrah to him. God came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said, 'Lo, you are going to die on account of the woman you have taken; she is a married woman.'¹² See God's loving kindness: when he saw the just man through fear of death nobly bearing Sarrah's removal and the king thus regarding

11. Gen 2.24.

12. Gen 20.2-3.

her as the good man's sister, then he gives evidence of his characteristic providence in rendering the good man more conspicuous, freeing Sarrah from outrage and preventing the king's crime. "God came to Abimelech in a dream by night." Wishing to forestall his lawlessness he brought realization to his mind at that time, the time of dreaming, the text says, shed light on what had escaped his notice, and instilled into him a deep fear by threatening him with death. "'You are going to die,'" the text says, remember, "'on account of the woman you have taken; she is a married woman.' Now, Abimelech had not laid a hand on her."

(11) Now, all this happened so that God's promise to the patriarch might take effect. You see, a little earlier he had promised him the birth of Isaac, and now the time was near; so in case there should be any threat to the promise he instilled such fear into Abimelech that he was too frightened to dare to lay a hand on Sarrah. This is the reason, in fact, that Sacred Scripture added, "Abimelech had not laid a hand on her"; instead, he apologized for his rashness and said, "Will you destroy an innocent people for what they did not know?"¹³ I didn't do this, he is saying, in the knowledge that she was his wife, did I? I mean, I didn't intend to wrong the foreigner, did I? It was as his sister that I was about to take her and I did what I did, thinking that he would also be honored in her. So "'will you destroy an innocent people for what they did not know?'" Are you going to destroy me, he says, for having acted in good faith?

(12) Then, to make clearer what he said, he added, "'Was it not he that said to me, She is my sister, and did she not say to me, He is my brother?'"¹⁴ Consider how they enjoyed harmony and consensus: he said this to me, he explained, and she agreed with what was said by him. "'I acted in good faith and with clean hands,'" he said, not as though on the point of committing some crime; rather, I did something sanctioned by law and in keeping with it, without any blame. So what was the response of the loving Lord? "But God spoke

13. Gen 20.4. .

14. Gen 20.5.

to him in a dream.”¹⁵ See how much considerateness the Lord of all employs in giving evidence of his characteristic goodness in every way. “‘I knew that you acted in good faith.’” I realize, he is saying, that they themselves brought on this situation and that you acted under a false impression created by what they said; in case you should sin as a result of their deceit, “‘I prevented you from sinning against me.’”

(13) Wonderful the considerateness of the expression, extraordinary the Lord's loving kindness. The sin would have been directed against me, he says. You see, just as with human beings, when someone delivers an insult to one of the servants who enjoys [418] his master's great regard, the master takes the insult as done to himself and says, You committed an outrage against me by this ill treatment meted out to my servant, so in the same way the good Lord too said, “‘I prevented you from sinning against me.’” They are in fact my servants, he says, and I take good care of them in this way by treating what is done to them as done to myself, be it good or ill. “‘For this reason I didn't allow you to lay a hand on her.’” Since I care greatly for them, and I was aware that it was in ignorance that you were about to commit this outrage on them, I prevented you from sinning against me.’” Don't just pay attention to this man as any one of a number, but come to understand that he is one of those dear to my heart and particularly close to me.

(14) “‘So restore the man's wife to him, because he is a prophet; he will pray for you, and you will live.’”¹⁶ See how he reveals the good man's virtue; he calls him a prophet as though to make the king his suppliant: “‘He will pray for you, and you will live,’” the text says. In other words, fearful of death at your hands, he planned this stratagem and more or less connived at the outrage against Sarrah; on the other hand, realize that his prayers will win you your life.

(15) Then, in case he should be inflamed with desire and overcome by Sarrah's beauty and should scorn the com-

15. Gen 20.6.

16. Gen 20.7. Chrysostom's LXX text employs *anthrōpos* as “man” in association with *gunē*, “woman,” “wife,” as correlatives.

mands, he aggravated his fear by promising to inflict worse punishment. "If in fact you do not restore her, realize that death will come upon you and all that is yours," the text goes on. Not only will you personally be punished for your disobedience, he is saying, but as well death will carry off on your account all that is yours. Now, this was the reason that God told him all this at night time, so that he might receive the warning in peace and quiet and carry out the direction with great fear. "First thing in the morning," the text goes on, "Abimelech arose, summoned his attendants and reported to them all these words."¹⁷ See how the king now becomes a herald of the just man's virtue, bringing him to the notice of everyone. Summoning all his attendants, the text says, note, he narrated to them everything revealed to him by God so that all might know both God's favor towards him and the providence accorded by the Lord on account of virtuous behavior.

(16) "But all the people were very frightened." Do you see how it was not idly or to no purpose that the good man had shifted place? I mean, had he remained at his former encampment, how would all the people of Gerar have been able to realize the degree of favor he enjoyed from God? "But all the people were very frightened." A great fear fell on them; they worried about everything. Then "Abimelech summoned Abraham," the text goes on. Consider, I ask you, the degree of notoriety with which the just man is now brought into the presence of the king after being treated a little before as beneath contempt, in the manner of a vagabond and stranger. When everyone is assembled in haste, the patriarch is summoned, for the time being ignorant of all this, and he then learns from the king in person what has happened to him on his account at God's hands. "He said to him," remember, "Why did you do this to us? What offense did we give you to cause you to bring such a great sin on me and my kingdom? You have done to us a deed no one else would do. What did you have in mind in doing it?"¹⁸

17. Gen 20.8.

18. Gen 20.9-10.

(17) What was the reason, he asked, that you wanted to embroil me in such a terrible sin? What on earth did you have in mind in doing it? See how he shows by his own words the threat delivered against him by God. You see, since God had said to him, “‘If you do not restore her, death will come upon you and all that is yours,’” [419] Abimelech interprets this very thing in saying, “‘What offense did I give you to cause you to bring such a great sin on me and my kingdom?’” I mean, surely the extent of the punishment did not stop at me? My whole kingdom was set to be utterly destroyed through the deception you contrived. “‘So what did you have in mind in doing it?’”

(18) Notice at this point, dearly beloved, the just man’s noble purpose in presenting them with a lesson in the knowledge of God under the guise of an explanation. “‘I said to myself,’” the text goes on, remember, “‘Surely there is no respect for God in this place, and they will kill me on account of my wife.’”¹⁹ I was concerned, he is saying, that as a result of being still held in ignorance you would have no regard for justice, and so I made allowance for the fact that when you discovered she was my wife you would, out of lust, have wanted to kill me—that was the reason I did it. See how in a few words he both takes them to task and at the same time teaches them that the person who has God uppermost in mind ought commit no crime, but rather fear that unsleeping eye and in view of the heavy judgment impending from that source have regard for justice.

(19) Then, from a wish to make excuses for himself, he said, Don’t think I lied to you in that way; “‘She is my sister on my father’s side, though not my mother’s, and she became my wife all the same.’”²⁰ She claims the same father as I, he says, and hence I called her my sister. So don’t condemn me:

19. Gen 20.11. De Montfaucon gravely condemns Chrysostom at this point for misrepresenting Abraham’s view of Abimelech as irreligious whereas the text shows him otherwise. In so doing De Montfaucon seems to have succumbed to the temptation of editor turning textual commentator; it is the “misjudgment” not of Chrysostom but of the Abraham of the text.

20. Gen 20.12.

even if the fear of death brought me to this sorry pass and the dread of your killing me but sparing her, still what was said by me was not a lie in the way you imply. See what great pains the good man takes to show that he had not told a lie even in this matter. For you to learn everything precisely from me (he is saying), listen also to the plan we formed between us “‘when God led me out from my father’s home.’”²¹ Observe in this case, I ask you, the good man’s wisdom in teaching them by way of story telling that from the very beginning he had a special relationship with God, and that God had personally moved him from home and led him thither so that the king might learn that he was one of those people who had great confidence in God.

(20) “‘When God led me out from my father’s house,’” he said, “‘I said to her, Please do me this kindness: whatever place we enter, say, He is my brother.’” You see, since he had said previously, remember, “‘I said to myself, Surely there is no respect for God in this place,’” and decided to take them severely to task, in his desire to mitigate the severity of his remarks he then said, Don’t think we came to this decision to do this on your account only. In fact, “‘as soon as God led me out from my father’s house I said to her, Please do me this kindness in whatever place we enter.’” I gave this direction to her, he said, about all the people inhabiting this country; he taught them that the pretense was free from deceit. It was the fear of death, after all, that drove us to it. With such words the good man subdued their wrath, revealed his own virtue and instilled into them adequate instruction in religion. So the king respected the just man’s great restraint, and he rewarded the patriarch with generosity on his part. “Abimelech took a thousand didrachma,” the text goes on, remember, “sheep and cattle, male and female slaves, and [420] restored to him his wife Sarrah as well.”²²

(21) Do you see, dearly beloved, God’s inventive wisdom? I mean, the man who was fearful of death, and took every

21. Gen 20.13.

22. Gen 20.14. The Hebrew leaves until v. 16 mention of the money.

means to be able to avoid it, not only did avoid it but was granted as well great confidence and became immediately famous. This, you see, is the way things are with God: not only does he deliver from distress those who make every effort to strive boldly against the onset of temptation, but he also guarantees them such serenity in this very distress that we have complete tranquility and achieve great material prosperity. See now the attention of the king to the just man: not only does he show his regard with so many gifts but he also grants him the right to occupy the land. "Behold," he said, "my land is before you; settle wherever you please."²³ You see, once he had learned that it was on his account and through his prayers that his life had been spared, he was anxious now to shower attention in this way on him, as a benefactor and champion, the man who was a stranger, a vagabond, one completely unknown.

(22) The text goes on, "He said to Sarrah, on the other hand, 'Behold, I have given your brother a thousand didrachma.'²⁴ See how, having received information from the just man and trusting in his words, he too calls him her brother. "'What I have given your brother,'" he says, "'will restore your reputation; tell the whole truth.'" What is the meaning of "'restore your reputation; tell the whole truth'"? For trying in ignorance to take you, the just man's wife, into my household, for this alone I have given a thousand didrachma for being guilty of offense, and I want to amend what I have done to you. But "'tell the whole truth'"—what is the meaning of "'tell the whole truth'"? Let everyone learn from you, he says, that nothing wrong was done by me, that you emerged untouched from my house. Instruct your husband, he says, that I am guiltless of sin; let him learn from you that nothing was done by me. Now, why did he say this? So that the good man, on learning it from her, might be quite satisfied and so pray the Lord with prayers on his behalf.

²³. Gen 20.15.

²⁴. Gen 20.16. The text of the remainder of the verse differs in the Hebrew and LXX, as also in Chrysostom, who struggles (of course) to rationalize it.

(23) In fact, when he said, "Tell the whole truth," that is to say, Instruct your husband as to what happened, Scripture immediately added, "Abraham prayed to God. God gave Abimelech the gift of full health for his wife and maidservants so that they gave birth; he had completely closed every womb in the house of Abimelech on account of Sarrah, Abraham's wife."²⁵ See how the Lord wishes in every way to render the just man conspicuous, and so he answers the patriarch's prayers by granting him the welfare of the king and all in his house. "Abraham prayed to God," the text says, remember. "God gave Abimelech the gift of full health for his wife and maidservants so that they gave birth; the Lord had completely closed every womb in the house of Abimelech." The reason why the good Lord inflicted this penalty on the king, guiltless though he was of sin, was that he might accede to the just man's prayers and thus resolve the problem, thereby rendering the just man more famous and well known. You see, all his planning and each arrangement he makes have the purpose of rendering conspicuous those who serve him, just like lamps, and making their virtue obvious in every way.

(24) See now, I ask you, dearly beloved, [421] how after his release from trouble the consummation of good things falls to the lot of the just man, the pledge of the promise, and there now takes effect the guarantee made to him in past times. "The Lord had regard for Sarrah," the text goes on, "just as he had promised, and he did the favor for Sarrah that he had said. Sarrah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age at the time the Lord had told him."²⁶ What is the meaning of "as he had promised" and "as he had said"? Just as he pledged, it means, when he was shown hospitality with the angels at the oak of Mambre, and he said, "I will come to you at this time, and Sarrah will have a son."²⁷ So this came to pass, and what was beyond hope by natural processes they saw came to be, not by human processes but by

25. Gen 20.17-18. The final clause requires a subject, not supplied by Chrysostom at this point; the Hebrew reads "Yahweh," LXX "God," and Chrysostom follows the former at his next quotation of the verse.

26. Gen 21.1-2.

27. Cf. Gen 18.14.

divine grace. "He called the son that Sarrah had borne him Isaac."²⁸ It was not idly that Scripture mentioned the words, "the son that Sarrah had borne him"; it did not say, "He called his son," but it added, "that Sarrah had borne him," that is, this woman who was sterile, childless, aged. The text goes on, "He circumcised him on the eighth day as the Lord commanded."²⁹ You see, the command was that newly born children should now be circumcised on the eighth day.

(25) Then, for us to learn at this point God's ineffable power in that things impossible for human beings are possible for him, Sacred Scripture once more mentions the time to us and teaches us in these words after the birth: "Now, Abraham was a hundred when his son Isaac was born to him. Now, Sarrah said, 'The Lord has brought laughter to me: whoever hears it will rejoice with me.'"³⁰ What is the meaning of "'The Lord has brought laughter to me'"? The birth is a source of joy to me. What is so remarkable about my joy? I will have everyone who hears it rejoicing with me, not because I gave birth but because it was in these circumstances that I gave birth. The unusual character of the birth amazed everyone and gave everyone particular joy on learning that, after being no better than a corpse, I suddenly became a mother, I bore a child from a frozen womb, and was actually able to suckle it and release a flow of milk after having thus far no prospects of childbearing.

(26) "She said, 'Who will let Abraham know that Sarrah is suckling her child?'"³¹ You see, the reason that the flow of milk was also granted was to give credence to the birth and to prevent anyone's presuming the child belonged to somebody else;³² after all, the flow of milk proclaims to all and sundry that the birth surpassed human expectations. "'Who will let Abraham know that Sarrah is suckling a child, that I

28. Gen 21.3.

29. Gen 21.4.

30. Gen 21.5-6. The word plays in the Hebrew text on Isaac's name do not survive into the Greek, and Chrysostom is probably unaware of them, grist though they would be to his mill.

31. Gen 21.7.

32. No detail of the text can be left unaccounted for.

have borne a son in my old age,'" that I have been able to have children despite my old age, and at such a time of life can feed it? "The child grew," the text goes on, "and was weaned. Abraham held a big celebration on the day his son was weaned."³³

(27) Do you see God's ineffable wisdom in putting to the test the good man's endurance when he and all those who observed him had seemed to have given up hope, guided as they were by human nature, and then bringing to pass his own promise? Let us too, dearly beloved, consequently give evidence of the same endurance as the just man's and, far from ever losing heart, let us be buoyed up with sound hope in the knowledge that neither problems of daily life nor any other human factor proves a real obstacle for us when God's grace intends to give evidence of his characteristic generosity. I mean, whenever he manifests his will, everything yields place [422] and gives way, difficult things become easy and what is impossible proves possible, provided we only give evidence of deep faith in him and prove superior to all human considerations by keeping our gaze fixed on his greatness.

(28) You see, he has promised those future blessings beyond description to those who live out their lives here with virtue, so will he not all the more provide as well the present good things provided we press ahead to those future ones by looking beyond the here and now? We shall in fact enjoy them in generous measure at that time most of all when we are prepared to look beyond them. So with this knowledge let us hanker after those blessings that are enduring and secure and know no end, so that we may live out this present life free from distress and succeed in attaining them. May it be the good fortune of us all to enjoy them, thanks to the grace and loving kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be the glory, now and forever, for ages of ages. Amen.

33. Gen 21.8.